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SOCIAL HIGHWAYMAN

ELIZABETH PHIPPS TRAIN

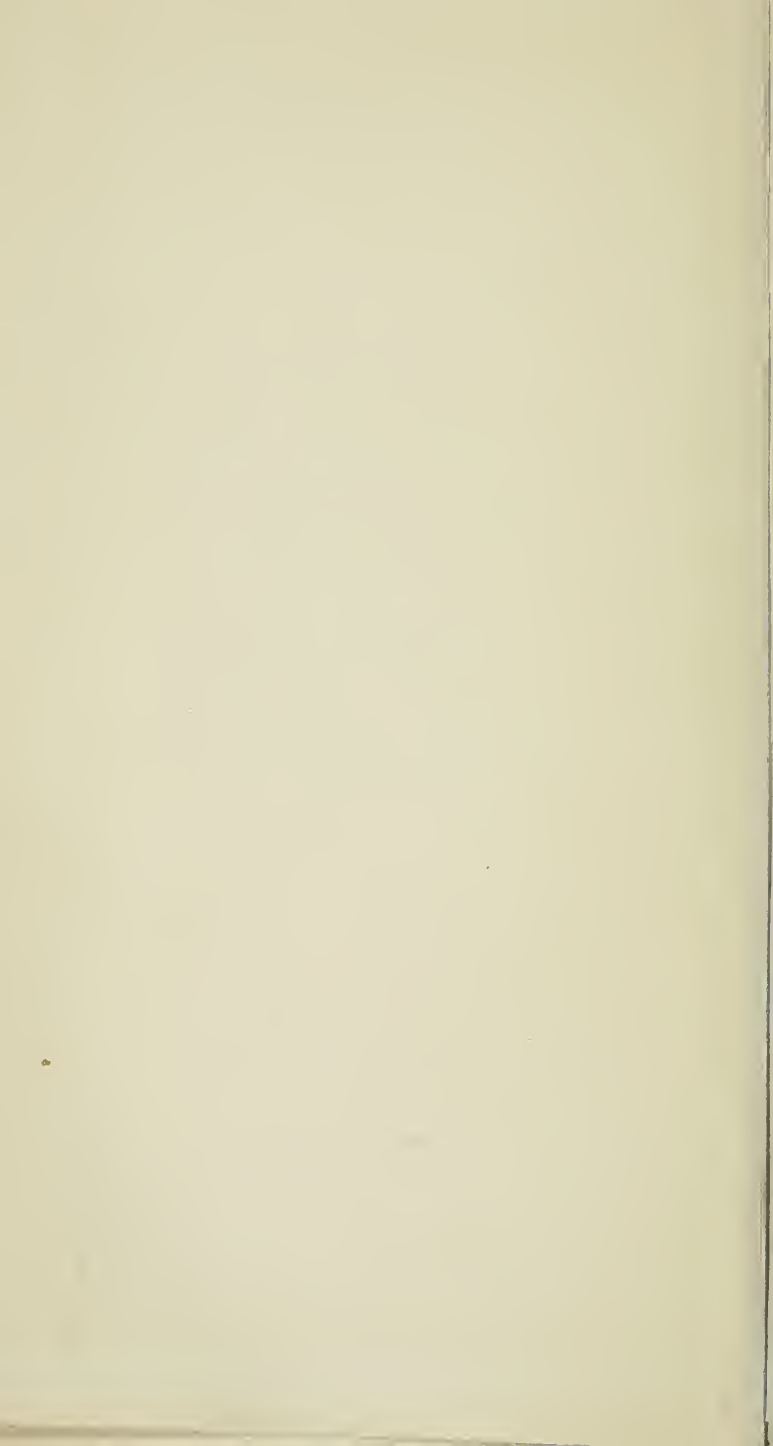
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“It was then that I met with one of the few unfortunate accidents which have marred my reputation for good service.”

A SOCIAL HIGHWAYMAN

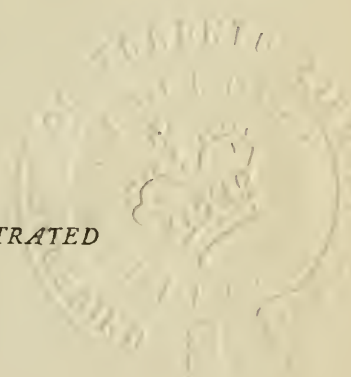
BY

Elizabeth Phipps Train

AUTHOR OF

“THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF
A PROFESSIONAL BEAUTY.”

ILLUSTRATED



PHILADELPHIA

J. B. LIPPINCOTT COMPANY

1896

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644098

22.10.56

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CHAPTER I

“ONE year's imprisonment with hard labor.
The prisoner may stand down.”

The sentence was lighter than I expected. The jury had acquired an impression that I was a bit wanting in the upper story.

As I left the court-room under guard, my eyes met those of a man sitting in the jury-box, a man who was a notable exception to the eleven typical specimens of the great unwashed and unpurified element of the American metropolis, among whom he was set as a jewel among coarse pebbles.

He was a dude : of that there could be no doubt. From the monocle in his right eye to the tip of his varnished boot, everything about

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him cried the fact aloud. A slender, slightly-put-together man, with a fair and delicately featured face,—an almost womanish cast of countenance, in fact. Dressed in the very height of the fashion, every detail of linen, cloth, and cut being of the finest description and latest style, he had edged away as far as possible from his next neighbor, a dirty, greasy, oily-haired German, and looked utterly and insufferably bored and disgusted. At the moment when I chanced to look at him he had winked the single eye-glass out of its position, and, with an expression of mingled relief and disdain on his face, was rising from his seat, evidently bent upon escaping from the amazing position into which Fortune had betrayed him.

As, personally conducted by an officer of the law, I was passing the jurors' room on my way to that safe harborage that the government provides for its involuntary wards, a languid shout arrested the progress of my escort. Naturally I paused also.

“Say-er, officer, one moment. I-er want to speak to your prisoner. I-er have permission from the court.”

Moved by curiosity, I turned around and glanced at the person accosting us : it was none other than the dude. He came up and motioned to the officer.

“Er-just step aside a moment, will you?”

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he said, with a slow drawl, which yet had something imperative in it. Then, as the man obeyed, he turned and stood for a moment gazing at me through two of the bluest eyes I have ever seen in a human face.

"I-er—I say, my man, how was it, guilty or not guilty?" he asked, presently.

I have wondered a thousand times since why I answered right off sharp and quick, "Guilty, sir." Such truthfulness isn't a weakness with me generally.

"I-er thought so," he drawled, with his eyes bent on the ground. Then, suddenly lifting his head, "What are you going to do when you-er—when you-er—when the year's up, you know?"

I told him that I had not looked so far ahead as that.

"No-er, I suppose not," he replied. "Well-er, I only wanted to say that-er—that you might look me up when you-er—when your time is again your own, say."

I suppose I looked surprised, for I certainly felt so, wondering what a dude could want of a jail-bird. He evidently remarked my expression, for he continued, with a flush like a girl's blush on his fair skin,—

"I-er—I was wondering, while I sat in that infernal trap in there, what-er—what a fellow could do when he got out of—out of——" He

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hesitated, either because he was too considerate to wound my feelings by using the bald word jail, or because his own susceptibilities were too delicate to handle it,

“Out of quod, you mean, sir?” I said.

He began to play with his eye-glass nervously.

“Er—exactly,” he answered. “Perhaps I could do something for you, you know. It—er—it seems to me such—er devilish hard lines—er, don’t you know? My name is Jaffrey, Courtice Jaffrey. If you care to call at my address when—er you get out, I—er might be able to do something to help you.”

I was about to thank him rather warmly, for, although I have knocked about a good bit in my life, gratuitous interest and offers of assistance had never before come within my experience ; but he headed me off with a weary yawn, which he raised a dog-skin-covered hand to conceal, mentioned his address, nodded to me and then to the officer, turned on his heel, and sauntered slowly off.

A year later I got my liberty, and the first use I made of it was to look up my man. I had his name and address pretty pat, I can assure you, for I had thought a good deal about him while working out my time, and had considerable curiosity to see what he was going to do for me. I couldn’t help wondering if he

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would not shirk the job when it came to the point.

It was about noon on a cold winter's day when I presented myself at his lodgings, which were in a fashionable part of the city, located in a bachelors' apartment-house of the most luxurious and comfortable sort. The door was opened by Mr. Jaffrey himself.

He had apparently just tubbed, for there was about him that wholesome and indescribable freshness and bloom that only a recent and wholesale application of soap and water can bestow. He was fittingly costumed for his *rôle* of human lily of the field. I rather wondered at so exquisite a being waiting on his own door, but shortly discovered the reason for it. Thinking that he would very likely not remember me, and holding my hat respectfully in my hand, I was about to introduce myself, when he spoke.

"Oh, ah, it is you! Er—let me see—er—Hanby the name was, I think. Devilish cold, eh? Walk in."

He gave a little effeminate shiver, and with a newspaper which he held in his hand motioned me to pass in ahead of him, while he closed the door. We went through a narrow hall-way lined with foils, weapons, armor, coats of mail, and trophies of the chase, effectively disposed upon a crimson background,

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the rich coloring of which, together with the glint of steel, the glow of brass, and the lustrous gleam of polished wood, was brought vividly into prominence by the electric light that, even in the daytime, burned in antique iron sconces built into the walls.

We passed into a small but exquisitely appointed dining-room, where upon a round mahogany table stood the remains of a breakfast which my advent had apparently interrupted. Mr. Jaffrey resumed his seat before it, after motioning me to take a chair, saying,—

“You won't mind my finishing, Hanby? Now—er—let me see—I promised to do something for you, didn't I?”

I assented, expressing my surprise that he should have remembered me.

“I rarely forget a face or a name,” he said, briefly, then continued, “Now—er, Hanby, don't talk for a minute. Here—er, take this paper and read it while I think. Thinking is such a devilish hard process, don't you know? I—er don't like to be—er talked to while I am doing it.”

I thought him a queer bird, but humored his fancy by holding the paper between us. Presently he said, aloud, but as if talking to himself,—

“I—er don't see why I shouldn't try it.” Then, addressing me in a quick, business-like

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tone, quite different from his ordinary drawl, he said,—

“Have you ever been a valet?”

“Yes, sir,” I answered.

“Know your business?”

“Up to the handle, sir.”

He looked me square in the face, and there was no sleepiness now in his blue eyes; they were sharp, alert, and penetrating.

“Well, look here,” he said, “my man has just left me. I need a valet, and you need a situation. I’m doing a risky thing in taking you into my service, but I have taken a good many risks in my life, and haven’t suffered much from the habit. I’ll give you fifty dollars a month and keep you until—well, until we decide to part. But, look here, Hanby, don’t you take me for a fool. I don’t ask anything about your past; think I’d better not, perhaps; but if you want a show for the future you’ve got it now. Only, don’t try any tricks with me.”

And so I became valet to Mr. Courtice Jaffrey. I soon found that he was quite a celebrity. He was widely known in New York, and his reputation as a dude was almost national. He was a member of all the best clubs, and, notwithstanding his many absurdities of dress and manner, he seemed to be popular with both men and women. Yet,

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though popular with all, he was intimate with none, and while he had hosts of acquaintances he had no close comrades. This seemed somewhat strange to me, as he had many qualities calculated to attach people to him.

For instance, he was generous to a fault and lavish to a degree. I supposed that he inherited money, for he was always in funds, and his hospitality was ever abundant and ready. His tastes were luxurious, and he gratified them without stint. During my whole term of service with him I never knew him to refuse a loan, while I could name hundreds of cases which his bounty relieved. As far as courtesy and good breeding are concerned, he was the most perfect gentleman I have ever known, and I have been in the employ of some of the best-bred of several nations.

His apartments were exceedingly handsome, and were furnished and decorated in the most exquisite taste and by the best firms. He kept a couple of thoroughbred horses and a variety of traps at a club stable near by, and when he required a groom I officiated in that capacity. I had had the best training in the requirements of my position when I was valet to Lord What-you-may-call-him and Colonel Sir What's-his-name. (I am not more explicit, as I left both services abruptly, and as these gentlemen, in common with all the world, will doubtless read

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this book, I do not care to give them a clue to my present whereabouts. It might be more satisfactory to them than to me.)

It was a good berth into which I had fallen, and I made up my mind to stick to it for a considerable period. My duties were not heavy, and my perquisites were many. In the morning I had ample time, before my master rang, to set the apartment in order, lay the breakfast-table, arrange the flowers (of which he was tremendously fond, a fresh and abundant supply being furnished every other day throughout the season by his florist), varnish his boots, and draw his bath, into which a bottle of orris-water was always emptied. The sound of his bell was my signal to mix a pretty stiff cocktail, which it was his habit to take every morning as an eye-opener. After carrying him this I drew up his blinds, laid out his fresh linen and the clothes he designated, and, after he had bathed, rubbed him down until his flesh (it was as fair as a woman's) glowed and shone like conch-shell.

About noon he went out, and I did not see him again until I took either his saddle-horse or one of his traps for him in the afternoon. He rarely dined at home unless he was entertaining, and was almost always absent in the evenings: so that I had a good deal of leisure time on my hands.

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I had been a few days in his service, and he had expressed himself well satisfied with my manner of performing my duties, when, one morning, as I was laying out his linen, he said,—

“Oh—er, Hanby, we have a dinner here to-night. Er—there's a list of the guests, all gentlemen, on the desk in the den, and a rough sketch of the *menu*. The—er people at the hotel will fill in the details, and—er you'll see about the wines, won't you, Hanby?”

The rest of that day was a busy time for me, and when, late in the afternoon, my master returned to dress, he was loud in his praise of everything I had done. No one can beat me at my own trade, and even Mr. Jaffrey's critical fastidiousness found nothing to alter in my arrangements.

It was to be a small dinner, only four gentlemen, besides my master, with a game of poker to follow in the den, but Mr. Jaffrey had me get him up as carefully, though in a somewhat less elaborate fashion, as if the party were to be honored by the presence of the fair sex.

The dinner passed off well, and you may be sure that when I say well it *was* well. The wines were of the right temperature, the service so noiseless that it might have been performed by invisible hands, and the cocktails so well mixed that every gentleman complimented me in turn upon them.

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But a little incident occurred afterward at the card-table which was most unfortunate, and which, I thought, created some suspicion of me not only in my master's breast but in the minds also of his guests.

The gentlemen had seated themselves about the table and were paying for their chips, when I brought in the smoking-tray. Mr. Jaffrey was telling a story, evidently suggested by the game.

"And this-er fellow," he was saying, "went down to one of those sea-shore places where-er you get a fish dinner 'with all the-er fixin's,' as they say in New England, don't you know. The girl took his order, and then-er she said to him, 'Have some-er—some Saratoga chips, sir?' 'Well-er,' says he, 'well-er, I don't know the game, but-er—but, yes, I'll be d—d if I don't come in; I'll take ten dollars' worth as a starter.' "

It was just at this moment that a man named Remsen drew out of his pocket a big roll of bills. There is something fearfully tempting to the human eye in such a sight. Dirty "green-backs" may not be beautiful from an æsthetic point of view, but I know of few things more alluring to most men.

Mr. Remsen drew out a fifty-dollar bill and laid it on the table beside him just as I reached his side to offer him the cigars. It was then that

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I met with one of the few unfortunate accidents which have marred my reputation for good service. A pack of cards was lying upon the table just beneath Mr. Remsen's elbow, and as I held the tray toward him my arm inadvertently brushed against them, scattering them with a thud all over the floor.

When a pack of cards is dropped, everyone naturally stoops to pick them up. This happened now, I, because I stopped to place my tray upon the table and so secure the use of both hands, being naturally the last to assist in the operation. When, finally, they were gathered up and the gentlemen again rose above the surface of the board, there was an exclamation from Mr. Remsen :

"I thought I put a bill on the table, didn't I? Or did I give it to you, Jaffrey?"

Mr. Jaffrey was banker. He shook his head.

"No, you didn't give it to me, old man. Must have—er put it back in your pocket."

"No, I saw him put it there," broke in another man. "Look under the table, Remmy; you must have brushed it off with your elbow."

"I will look, sir," I said, respectfully; and it ended in everybody's stooping again to search.

But all to no purpose: no bill was there. Mr. Jaffrey looked greatly annoyed, and shot a

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quick, suspicious glance at me. But I stood firm.

"This is—er most unfortunate, Remsen," he said. "I—er—I feel d—d awkward to have it happen here. Wish you would allow me to—er—to replace it, don't you know."

But his guest was a gentleman, and to this proposition of course he would not listen, but, with very nice courtesy, he at once changed the subject, and so relieved the awkwardness of the situation.

I suppose it was natural that the suspicions of my master's guests should fall upon his new servant, but I was sorry that Mr. Jaffrey himself should so soon have occasion to suspect me.

As I was getting him ready for bed, in the early hours of the morning, after his guests had gone, he turned suddenly upon me.

"Where—er—where's that bill, Hanby?"

I had been finishing off the heel-taps of the bottles left from dinner, and my feelings were easily touched. I felt a sudden moisture dim my eyes.

"Mr. Jaffrey, it's early days to be suspecting me, sir," I said. "I know no more than you yourself, sir, what became of the money."

My master finished rubbing the crystal emollient into his white hands, and yawned wearily.

"Of course you are lying to me, Hanby,

but-er—but a good servant is-er—is a luxury worth paying something for, and though you are a-er—a scoundrel, Hanby, you-er—you are a clever one. I shall-er give Mr. Remsen a bill to-morrow and-er tell him you found it-er-er under the grate. But-er, Hanby, don't let it happen again."

I tried to protest my innocence, but either emotion got the better of my utterance or a too faithful discharge of the duty of clearing my master's table prevented my eloquence from being as effective as I wished, for all the result I produced was a sleepy laugh from Mr. Jaffrey and a drowsy "Go-er—go to bed, Hanby. You're drunk, man ; tight's an owl."

As he was eating his breakfast a few mornings later, Mr. Jaffrey said to me,—

"Hanby, I want you to go up to Seventy-First Street with a note this-er morning. I-er am going out of town, and shall not be home till-er late to-night. You will find the-er address on the envelope, and-er wait for an answer, which you may leave on my dressing-table."

I am always glad when it is the habit of my employers to use wax in sealing their correspondence. It greatly simplifies my exertions in the paths of knowledge. To open a cover that has been gummed and to re-gum it satisfactorily requires considerable skill and great

care: the steam is apt to give the paper a blotched and bloated appearance. But to break a seal, re-heat the wax, and again stamp it, is the easiest of operations. This simple business, of course, requires that the die shall be a bit of my master's desk-furniture and not a personal ornament.

As a rule, Mr. Jaffrey was rather careful about his correspondence, posting his letters himself, and destroying immediately those of any consequence which he received. I seldom, therefore, had the opportunity, which on occasions may be of untold value, of discovering the contents of his letters. Here, however, was a chance that I determined not to miss.

I felt that some matter of interest must be involved in my errand, else my master would not be so anxious to have the answer to his note placed on his dressing-table where he could get it before retiring. He rarely showed concern about his correspondence, and this exceptional indication of interest aroused my curiosity.

About twelve o'clock he relieved me of his presence, and I at once set to work. It was the matter of a moment to break the huge violet seal stamped with a modest crest bearing the motto "*Fortes fortuna juvat*," which I suppose is Latin, but which was Greek to me.

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There were only a few lines inside, but they were ardent, and at once answered a question which I had often put to myself,—whether my master's heart had a lien upon it or not. The note ran as follows :

“I cannot come up to see you as usual this afternoon, my dearest, as I must go down to Long Island to look at a horse I am thinking of buying. I cannot rest to-night, however, unless I hear that your cold is better. For God's sake, take care of yourself, or, if not for His, then for mine, for you are the only thing in life that makes it worth my living. My man will bring your answer, which I hope will set my mind at rest. I should not leave without seeing you, but that there is an important matter involved in my going.

“Ever your loving

“COURTICE.”

The envelope bore no name, but was merely addressed to “Suite 2, Seventy-First Street, New York.”

Here, then, abode my master's divinity. There was one bit of information gained ; it might or might not be of service, but at all events it could do me no harm to have secured it. I sealed up the envelope, re-stamped it, and set out to take it to its destination, wonder-

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ing if I might, by good luck, get a glimpse of the woman to whom it was written.

The apartment house to which it was directed was a comfortable but exceedingly unpretentious one, and of course I concluded that my master's attachment could scarcely be an open and legitimate one, for I felt that he was too ambitious a man to marry a woman from such modest circumstances as this home of hers indicated.

I stepped into the elevator and told the boy I wished to go to Suite No. 2.

"What kind of lady lives there?" I asked, thinking this a good source to tap. "Married or single?"

The fellow paused in his whistling rehearsal of "Ta-ra-ra-boom-de-ay" long enough to say, "Two ladies lives there; don't know whether they're married or not: one ain't, anyway," and continued his rehearsal.

"Ah! respectability in the shape of a sheep-dog," I thought. Aloud I said, "What is her name?—the one you know to be unmarried?"

The elevator came to a halt as he answered, "Jermyn,—Miss Jermyn. Door's round that corner." And, stepping back into the elevator, he slammed to the door and shot down again, concluding the chorus of the song as he disappeared from view.

I thought that I would like to see what

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my master's taste in women was like, and so asked the maid who opened the door if I might see Miss Jermyn. She said "yes," and admitted me into a small but exceedingly pretty parlor, much more dainty and luxurious than one would have expected from the outside of the house. It bore evidences of the same good taste as that which had fitted up my master's rooms, and, indeed, there was a similar individuality about both apartments that showed them to have been furnished by the same person.

It was curious, however, that this room, apparently the parlor of a young woman, was less—well, not less luxurious, exactly, but less fashionably so, let me say, than that of Mr. Jaffrey. There was here, as there, every appointment of comfort and convenience, a little less up to date, as it were, than the surroundings of my master.

From this indication of a more careless regard for fashionable trifles and frivolities, I concluded that Mr. Jaffrey was in the toils of a woman of a stronger and less worldly nature than his own,—of one of those somewhat severe and masculine characters which obtain such powerful hold upon some men. As I stood waiting, hat in hand, I expected that every moment would bring, sweeping majestically into the room, a large, Junoesque, com-

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manding beauty in whose splendid superiority I should easily detect the spell that bound my master to her.

Imagine, then, my surprise when suddenly I heard a sound behind me, and, turning quickly, saw issuing, not from the entrance to the room I was facing, but from a small door partially hidden by a portière, a young, very slender and unimposing girl on crutches !

She swung herself a couple of paces into the room and paused, resting on her crutches, evidently awaiting an explanation of my business with her. I was so amazed that for a moment my self-possession deserted me, and I stood staring at her, at this delicate, fragile, unprepossessing cripple with whose life my master's was so evidently bound up.

"You wished to see me?" she asked, addressing me; and I noticed that she had a beautiful voice, sweet, musical, and plaintive without being fretful. It was like a harmony in a minor key. I quickly recovered myself.

"I have a letter for you," I said, handing it to her,—“from my master.”

She held out for the letter a delicate white hand which, I observed, was unadorned by any ring whatever.

"From your master? Oh!" as her eyes fell upon the address, "you are Mr. Jaffrey's new man ! Is there an answer?"

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I told her that I had been directed to wait for one, and she bade me be seated until it should be ready. Then, with a slight, gracious inclination of the head, she turned and swung herself again from the room.

I made my eyes do me good service while I sat there, waiting. I believe that I could have described every article in that room with my eyes shut. There were pictures of Mr. Jaffrey everywhere, on tables, mantel, desk, brackets, and even in pretty Florentine frames on the wall. He was in every variety of costume, and, I must say, made a fairly effective picture.

There, he was in evening dress, with his monocle stuck in his eye; here, in his long fur-lined coat, the broad rich collar of which made such an admirable setting for his blond head. Again he was in pink, as a member of the Meadowbrook Hunt, and again in a Poole suit of huge checks, with gaiters, Derby hat, and cane.

One frame interested me beyond the others. It was a double one of gold, of miniature shape, with true lovers' knots surmounting the two faces it enclosed. One of these was my master's, and I liked it better than any of the others, it was so simple, plain, and direct. A very good likeness of an exceedingly good-looking man, which would have given a stranger no idea of his dudish proclivities.

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The other face was that of the girl with whom I had just been speaking. I studied this last closely, seeking in vain a trace of that beauty for which I knew Mr. Jaffrey had such a keen appreciation. There was no trace of it in the sweet, gentle, refined countenance that returned my gaze. There were earnestness and depth in the eyes, which I remembered to be brown, and there was a little expression of wistfulness about the delicate mouth, as if the girl realized how much she lost by reason of her infirmity ; but as for beauty !—Faugh ! I was disgusted.

That a gentleman like my master, rich, good-looking, a tremendous swell and a thorough-going man of the world, should throw himself away on such a girl as that ! It made me sick, and I took a violent dislike to her from that moment. I had not very long to wait before the reply was brought me, and I did not see Miss Jermyn again, as the note was delivered to me by the maid.

I was in great good luck, for it was gummed and not sealed. Otherwise, being unable to come at her die, I should not have ventured to possess myself of its contents. A little steam aided me in opening the envelope when I reached home, and it was thus easy for me to discover that which I append :

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“MY DARLING,—

“The day will seem a dreary one without a glimpse of my sun ; but whatever makes for his welfare has so good a justification in my eyes that it reconciles me to a deprivation as great as that of the temporary loss of my life’s brightness. My cold is doing well ; indeed, it troubles me scarcely any. You are quite too foolish about me, my dear. If I am somewhat frail and not very robust in appearance, I am nevertheless strong and wiry, and shall live a long, long time to weary your loving care and devotion.

“Ever, dearest, devotedly yours,

“ALICE L. J.”

I was so utterly disgusted with this epistle, as showing the strength of my master’s infatuation for this miserable Dot-and-carry-one, that I felt an impulse to tear the love-sick note into a thousand pieces. But impulse is a costly luxury, in which dependants cannot afford to indulge, and common sense restrained me. Instead, I took great pains to re-gum it carefully and place it against a silver atomizer on my master’s dressing-table, whence a little later I had the supreme dissatisfaction of seeing him hastily snatch it and eagerly devour its contents.

It struck me then as never before how wholly

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incomprehensible are the passions of men. Who would have dreamed that Mr. Courtice Jaffrey, who might have chosen from the most distinguished of two worlds, would allow his affections to be ensnared by a miserable little blonde jade with broken legs !





CHAPTER II

TWO or three days after my pilgrimage up to Seventy-First Street my master announced his intention of giving, upon the following evening, an after-the-opera supper-party to some eight or ten ladies and gentlemen. From the minuteness and precision of his orders, the care and solicitude which he evinced as to the smallest and most insignificant details, and the recklessness he manifested regarding expenditure, I concluded that he was going to entertain guests of unusual distinction.

And when I read the names (I caught a glimpse of the notice of the event he prepared for the press) I saw that I was not mistaken in my surmise. Without exception they were the names of Personages, not of mere persons; and my estimate of my master's social position went up many pegs when I discovered his ability to command the society of such nobles.

The guest of honor was an English duchess; that is, she had been an American Dutchy (her father had made a vast fortune in export-beer

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in the West) who had developed through the natural laws of social evolution into a British peeress. Her title, Duchess of Clayborough (*née* Chiselby), smote upon the ears of two nations like a chime of golden bells. Her visiting-cards with "Clayborough House, Sussex," in the lower left-hand corner, were, by those dames fortunate enough to acquire them, never withdrawn from the great receptacles wherein, toward the end of the season, those thin little white ghosts of names and reputations accumulate in such multitude. When these were emptied and a fresh start made, these special bits of pasteboard were always retained to form the nucleus of a new collection.

Following in her wake and pressing her hard for fame if not for fortune was *the* Professional Beauty, *par estime*, of the year. Her reputation was, of course, transatlantic (no reputation of home-manufacture is of value in American eyes), and the greater part of her time was spent in the Happy Hunting-Grounds of London society, to the privileges of which she had attained by reason of the utter integrity of her physical perfection. She had taken advantage of the interregnum between autumn country-house visiting (that period so prolific of results to the matrimonial sportsman) and the beginning of the season, to flit like a meteor through the most

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distinguished circles of her own countrymen, dazzling and fascinating all beholders by her incomparable charms.

I had seen her riding in the Park, and even I, who have seen most of the celebrated beauties of my time, acknowledge her to be a fine figure of a woman.

Then came two of the leaders of New York society, Mrs. I. Noble-Revere and Mrs. Munyon Pyle,—“Money-Pile” Wall Street called her husband,—women with magnificent establishments, stupendous fortunes, immense social power, and—husbands. The latter, however, like well-trained servants, knew enough to minister to, without obtruding upon, the comfort and welfare of those who had acquired the right to command them. They were social nonentities, though financial magnates, and one never considered them.

The list of the women closed with the star whose talent and genius were to entertain them in the earlier part of the evening, Madame Geneviève Mirandu, the latest thing in operatic stellar attractions, also an American, born in the coal-regions of Pennsylvania, discovered by chance and educated by a syndicate of rich women, whose claims to her consideration and gratitude she had dispersed by a contemptuous kick of her small foot when she reached the topmost rung on that ladder of acquirement

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that had been erected for her through their means. Report had it that she was a nightingale difficult to lure, and I wondered at my master's success in her direction more than in that of the others, high even as was their degree.

The men, of whom, besides my master, there were some half-dozen, may be more easily dismissed. Perhaps first (*place aux renommés*) was Carolus Despard, the artist, concerning whom, thanks to his wide-spread reputation, it is unnecessary to go into detail. His studio, the most unique and gorgeous apartment I have ever seen (I had soon after an opportunity of studying it at my leisure, as will be shown farther on), is the gate of Paradise to the aspiring Bohemian.

Then there were two distinguished authors, one a Frenchman who was making a tour of this country for the frankly confessed purpose of publishing his views upon it, views which would be about as discriminating and valuable as the report of a prize-fight by a woman journalist, and the other a Russian exile, versatile, accomplished, and entertaining, who was working a Nihilistic vein of pure romance with beneficial effect upon a hitherto lean and hungry purse. He claimed to be a count, and, as Russia is a big country and its illustrious waifs and strays rarely localize their birthplaces, no

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one disputed his claim. But I had seen him, about six years previously, at Monte Carlo with a croupier's rake in his hand. However, I make it a point to forget many things.

A Polish musician who played like a seraph and ate with his knife, a world-renowned traveler whose gyrations about the pole have gained him wider celebrity than that of the most skillful gymnast, Mr. Merton Harley, a gentleman who was, perhaps, my master's most intimate friend, and Gordon Key,—God's Donkey, they call him at the clubs,—one of the richest bachelors in New York and the most celebrated man-about-town, completed the number of guests. You may imagine whether, with such persons of distinction to cater for and serve, I was not on my mettle.

But I was satisfied when, at eleven o'clock that night, I threw a last glance about the apartments and over the table before answering the electric bell which announced the return of Mr. Jaffrey with his guests.

The rooms were always beautiful, and they had been further adorned by a lavish supply of flowers. Indeed, so thickly scattered were the blossoms that it almost seemed as if the ceiling had opened and let fall a copious floral shower. The dining- and drawing-rooms opened out of each other, half-drawn portières of rare Persian rugs marking the distinction

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between them and making a very beautiful and rich framework for the exquisite picture of still-life that my artistic exertions had created.

I do not remember whether I have noted the fact that Mr. Jaffrey's apartment was situated at the very top of the house. He had selected it from preference, and the lift made it as easily accessible as one of the lower floors. His dining-room, which I have not hitherto described, awaiting this as the most fitting opportunity for so doing, was a unique and exceedingly effective room. In order to carry out his scheme of decoration he had caused the original ceiling to be torn down and a high and vaulted roof to be substituted. This had been exquisitely painted by an artist of some local renown to represent the sky, over which by daylight fleecy clouds seemed sailing, while at night the effect was that of the evening heavens. Here and there at intervals stars had been cut, indistinguishable by day, but at night glowing with soft electric light, which, with the shaded candles upon the table, alone illumined the room. Other fixtures there were in the walls for use on ordinary occasions, but when my master especially wished to honor his guests the heavens smiled down upon them.

He had selected for his table decorations

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that evening orchids, the rarest and most fragile of flowers, and scarcely an inch of the exquisite table-cloth, a thing of cobwebby linen and lace insertion laid upon palest green satin, showed, on account of this even more costly floral covering. In the middle of the table a great silver plateau, plain as a mirror, save for a narrow rococo edge, held on the middle of its burnished surface a picturesque heap of southern fruits,—apricots, nectarines, peaches, oranges, lemons, and huge clusters of black and transparent grapes, a sight to move the most jaded palate to fresh desire.

Scarcely a suggestion of an interior was offered by the room itself, which looked like nothing so much as a tropical jungle, so lined were its walls with palms, great spreading ferns, orange-trees in flower and fruit, and cacti. A large Louis-Quinze screen of panelled mirrors hid the passage into the pantry and reflected the exquisite table and its glittering appointments.

It was no wonder that a simultaneous exclamation escaped the women, used though they were to the superlative expression of nineteenth-century luxury, when their eyes fell upon the beautiful scene. Even the duchess was moved to press her host's arm in approval before relinquishing it as she took her seat.

"After all," she said, in that cultivated

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English accent which her promotion has brought with it, "for absolute disregard of consequences, commend me to my own countrymen."

"What-er—what is the good of thinking of the-er—the-er consequences, your grace?" Mr. Jaffrey replied, as he stabbed a Little-Neck clam with his oyster-fork. "I-er suppose by consequences you-er mean the cost. Why-er, I shall have made a good, an excellent bargain by this little-er expenditure to-night, don't you know? I shall-er be ever so much richer to-morrow; richer in memories, richer in-er æsthetic acquirements, richer in-er experience, and richer in-er—in-er—oh, in ever so many ways."

I was filling Miss Belmine's glass with Chablis as he said this, and she was remarking to Count Nihilo Runoff,—

"Her grace is out in full regalia to-night. What diamonds! Look at that sun! and those crescents! and that string of gems about her neck! Almost barbaric, such glitter, don't you think?"

In common with the count I glanced at the duchess, and did not wonder that the Beauty had been moved to exclamation by her appearance.

All the women were dressed or undressed, as you choose to call it, within an inch of their

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lives ; but she, the apotheosis of malted grain, Her Grace of Clayborough, outshone them all.

She was a very beautiful woman of the brunette type, and her gown, of a curious shade of rose satin, clouded over the bust and over the huge puffs which did service for sleeves by a deep fall of black lace, was splendidly becoming. Her own bosom and that of her gown were fairly ablaze with diamonds, and a superb sun shone from the dark masses of her rich black hair, like a single planet in a midnight sky. The string of gems to which Miss Belmine referred was one that was frequently noted by the society paragraphers. It was a chain of very pure white stones, in a setting of white gold so delicate as to show scarcely at all. This was wound once about her neck and then fell, in a loose loop, to her waist. She had a trick, apparently due to absent-mindedness, but doubtless the result of studied effect, of toying with this scintillating chain, raising it in a careless handful, dropping it as if it were a string of Scotch pebbles, and letting it trickle casually through her slender fingers, only to catch it up again and repeat the process. In this manner, when her hands were not otherwise employed, the diamonds were kept in constant motion, and so glittered and sparkled and shone and burned, attracting and fascinating the gaze of the most careless beholder.

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She was the guest of Mrs. Munyon Pyle, and the latter, seated on my master's left, was recounting to Carolus Despard, who had taken her in, some close shave that their brougham had had on the way to the opera. I caught the end of the story as, in my tour of the table, I reached them :

“ 'Twas really a narrow escape. The horses are new,—Munny has just bought them,—and, as I have been down to Tuxedo for the past week, they have not had much exercise.”

“ Ah, yes ; fresh as paint, I suppose. Those brutes of coachmen never properly obey orders as to exercising, unless your eye is on them. I congratulate you and the duchess upon your escape.” He raised his glass, and, leaning forward, caught her grace's eye, to embrace her in the toast.

“ To our good fortune and the disappointment of the gods !” he exclaimed, bowing to the two women in turn.

My master of course raised his wine and joined in drinking the toast, drawling, as he deposited the empty glass again on the table,—

“ An excellent—er sentiment, Caro, but—er—er *à cause de quoi ?*”

The story was then rehearsed for his benefit, but I lost it, as my duties called me out of ear-shot. As I was about serving her grace with *petits souvenirs en embuscade, à la Yvette Guil-*

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bert, an absolutely new creation of the chef whom my master patronized and a sort of *entrée en coquille*, the elements of which were so skilfully disguised and so artistically produced that though the flavoring was strong it did not offend the most fastidious palate, while it awoke a thousand delicious reminiscences of past feasts,—as I was about serving this novel and seductive *entrée*, I say, I heard my master ask,—

“Had-er—had you your footman with you, Mrs. Pyle?”

Mrs. Pyle shrugged her shoulders.

“Unfortunately, no,” she replied. “The creature has taken this time to indulge in some sort of illness. So stupid of him! Its a horrid nuisance for me, just now while the duchess is with me; but I have a new man coming to-morrow.”

“Will you-er—will you drive home with the same horses?”

“Oh, yes, I suppose so. The streets will be quiet by that time, and there will be no danger.”

Mr. Jaffrey shook his head.

“I-er am not so sure of that,” he said. “I-er shall send my man home with you on the box. He-er is a quick-witted rascal, don’t you know, and-er no end of a fellow about horses. He-er——”

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Again I was obliged to pass out of hearing, reluctant though I was to obey the necessity, but I found later on that my master's arguments had prevailed, as I received orders from him, after the supper was concluded and the guests had passed into the drawing-room, to hold myself in readiness to occupy the second seat on the box of Mrs. Pyle's brougham when that lady should see fit to depart.

It was not until some two hours later, however, that the desirableness of such a proceeding seemed to suggest itself to Mrs. Pyle. It was half-after two, and I had had time to set the dining-room in order after the hotel-men had cleared the table, and to catch several cat-naps in my sitting-room, before I was summoned. My light slumbers had been disturbed by dreams in which the gleaming gems worn by the Duchess of Clayborough played a prominent part. It seemed to me that I was in a sort of bower, watching a cascade falling from a great height. I thought that as it fell it seemed to change into a rainbow of wonderful colors which, although a rainbow, was yet marvellously luminous and brilliant. I said aloud, "They must be throwing colored electric lights upon it to give it that appearance," and a voice answered me, "Fool! those are diamonds, not water, which you see there. Plunge in your hands and help yourself; such

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a chance does not come twice in a man's lifetime. You will be rich, rich, rich!" And I did as the voice bade me, but, instead of grasping that glittering, scintillating stream, I awoke to find myself clutching with both hands the leg of the table.

To say the dream did not affect me would be untrue. The sight of such diamonds as those worn by her grace would arouse the cupidity of men less easily tempted than I. I could not help casting up the probable value of that splendid trinket, and picturing to myself the easy and comfortable existence which its possession would insure to a man skilful enough to acquire it.

When I answered the bell which aroused me from dreams and visions connected with those fascinating sparklers, I found the guests assembling in the hall, preparing for departure and showering upon their host superlative expressions of their appreciation of his entertainment, uttered, however, in that languid, almost bored, manner and tone which might mislead one not familiar with the customs of fashionable society.

As I appeared upon the scene, Mr. Jaffrey was folding the duchess in a wrap of black and gold brocade, lined and edged about its numerous capes with royal ermine, and was fastening it at the throat with a deftness that would have



“There is—er a fastening here.”

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done credit to a French maid. He was exceedingly clever in his comprehension of the puzzling details of woman's dress, and was never betrayed into the awkwardness frequently occasioned his sex by those capricious and bewildering eccentricities, hooks and eyes.

"You are the first man who has ever solved the intricacies of that fastening," her grace was saying, with her beautiful face raised to his, and her big, languorous black eyes glowing into the blue ones just above her.

His hands still lingered below the softly rounded chin, as if they loved their task, and as she spoke he slowly dropped them, with that deliberateness of movement peculiar to him, to the next fastening just over her bosom.

"There is—er a fastening here," he said, lowering his voice and meeting her challenging look with one full of significance, "which the world says is—er—is securely defended against all attempts. Would—er—would that I had equal comprehension of—er—of the—er mysteries of its peculiar construction."

He had dropped a pace or two back, and, with his hands thrust into his pockets, was standing confronting her, with a bold look of admiration on his face.

She lowered her eyes for an instant, and then raised them, filled with alluring encouragement, to his.

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“And yet its secret might so easily be forced from its owner’s keeping by—the right man,” she replied, softly. Then, changing her tone and extending both hands, she continued, “The charm of this place makes us quite forget decency. The tardiness of our departure will make you repent your hospitality. It has been quite too delicious, and I shall remember it for ever and ever. Good-night! Many thanks! Too bad to take your man out at this hour, but I confess I shall feel safer. You are going down with us? Quite unnecessary. You will? Oh, you prince of hosts!” And so, conducted by my master, the charming group trooped out to the lift, quite filling it by their number, while I took the stairs.

Among the carriages waiting below, that of Mrs. Pyle was distinguishable by the fretfulness and impatience of its horses. They had been waiting some time, and had grown nervous and tired. Mr. Jaffrey placed the two ladies within, and I mounted the box, my master explaining to the coachman that, in consequence of the late difficulty with the horses, Mrs. Pyle felt nervous at not having another man at hand in event of accident.

The fellow was evidently a surly brute, although too well trained to make any reply to Mr. Jaffrey, but no sooner had we started than he began muttering to himself some re-

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marks upon the cursed interference of other people.

I pretended to take no notice of him, being, in fact, too much occupied with my own thoughts to spare any of them to him. Suddenly, however, he began a more direct attack upon me.

"And nobody but a damned understrapper as didn't dare say his soul was his own would let himself be sent out on such business at such an hour," he said.

This stirred me up. "What's that you say?" I cried.

He repeated his remark, with a good many insulting additions, and—well, it is not necessary to repeat what I answered. The details of a fight are never very interesting reading, unless to the sporting world; it is enough to say that we had it back and forth, back and forth, hotter and hotter, until both our tempers were at boiling pitch and his hands shook so he could hardly hold the reins.

"Look here," said I, finally, "I've had enough of your gab. Hold your jaw, now, and I'll meet you to-morrow, like a man, in any stable you name, where we'll have fair play, and, by —, I'll knock the stuffing out of your——"

But I never finished the sentence; for just then we came to a bit of road which was roped

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off with red lanterns, leaving a narrow passageway for carriages. The horses had been growing excitable under his angry hands, and the sight of the red lights proved too much for their nerves. One shied violently ; this frightened the other ; the carriage swerved sharply to the right, nearly throwing me off the box, and then up Madison Avenue we tore, wholly at the mercy of the maddened brutes, who had absolutely escaped control.

I heard a faint shriek from the carriage, evidently from one of the terrified women within, then the windows being shut down into their sockets, and a wild shout from Mrs. Pyle,—

“Shall we jump? Shall we jump? Oh, heavens ! what is it?”

I yelled back, “Not for your lives ! Keep still ; it is a clear road, and we’ll soon get them under.” But at such a pace were we going that it was all I could do to keep myself upon the box.

“Are you done up? Shall I take the reins? Hand them over, if you want,” I gasped out to the coachman, all sense of anger being forgotten in this common danger which stared us in the face.

He gave a grunt implying that he could still hold on, although his doing so was almost an empty form, for his touch upon the lines was

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all but useless. Just then, as ill luck would have it, we heard the sound of a gong in the distance.

“Good God ! A fire-engine !” I ejaculated, and the next moment we saw it looming down the avenue, a great, horrible, angry-looking monster rushing furiously toward us. “Turn them into the sidewalk,—into a house,—anywhere !” I cried to the almost exhausted man beside me ; “can’t you ?”

“God ! no !” he breathed, agonizedly : “they won’t mind my hand.”

Another instant, and the thing was upon us. I have a very confused impression of what happened. In talking it over afterward with the coachman (who turned out a very decent and plucky fellow), we agreed that the horses, on coming abreast the engine, jumped to one side, bolted again, and brought up against the hook-and-ladder truck. At all events, the brougham was overturned, the shafts snapped off close to the body of the carriage, we were thrown violently to the ground, and the horses escaped to pursue their own sweet will, being captured, the next morning, somewhere up in Harlem.

I was lucky enough to get off scot-free, and my first thoughts were for my companion. He, poor chap, was lying with his head broken open by the curbstone, against which he had

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fallen. Then I remembered the ladies, who had been my special charge. I went back to the brougham, which lay upon its side, and from which no sound proceeded.

As I limped along I couldn't for the life of me help thinking of my dream, that glorious, dazzling, glittering dream, and of a voice which had said, "Help yourself! Such a chance does not come twice in a lifetime."

The avenue had been quite deserted when we collided against the hook-and-ladder truck, and this and the engine had proceeded on their ways, too much occupied with the danger it was their business to relieve to heed our strait. Now, however, one or two policemen hove in sight, doubtless warned of trouble by the appearance of the runaways.

I had but a couple of moments in which to investigate the amount of damage sustained by the two ladies, when one of the officers accosted me.

"Anybody killed?" he asked.

"No ; but two ladies injured," I replied.

"Badly?"

"Can't say : they are both unconscious."

I mentioned their names, which duly impressed him, and the fact that both, the duchess particularly, wore jewels of great value, suggesting that it would be well to keep the mob at a distance, for a goodly number of persons,

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springing seemingly from the pavement, were already gathered about the carriage.

He nodded and took measures to carry my advice into effect, while a second officer hurried off to the nearest patrol-box to telephone for an ambulance.

It was a matter of little difficulty to revive Mrs. Pyle, who had merely fainted from terror, and who on coming to herself showed signs of hysteria until she discovered the more serious plight of the duchess. The latter presented a sorry spectacle. In the overset of the carriage she had been thrown violently forward, her head striking with considerable force, probably, against the hard edge of the door. This blow, besides stunning her, had cut a deep gash in her white forehead, from which the blood was flowing freely down over her face and neck, staining with hideous contrast the ermine trimming of her gorgeous wrap.

We succeeded in extricating her from the overturned carriage, and placed her in a more comfortable position upon the cushions which we made into a temporary couch upon the sidewalk. A messenger was sent for the nearest doctor, and another to a neighboring stable for a carriage, Mrs. Pyle's sensibilities being horribly outraged at the idea of placing a duchess within a police ambulance !

By the time the physician arrived, however,

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her grace had regained consciousness, and after a hasty examination he delighted Mrs. Pyle with the assurance that no serious damage, aside from the temporary disfiguration of the ducal countenance, had been sustained by her noble guest.

We placed the women in the carriage, and I again became their escort, depositing them within a few minutes at the door of Mrs. Pyle's residence on the corner of Madison Avenue and —th Street. Both ladies were profuse in expressions of gratitude for my attentions to them.

When I reached home I found my master in bed and asleep, and therefore waited until morning before acquainting him with the news of the disaster. Then—for I had many thoughts, some of them strange and perplexing enough, to occupy my mind—I sat down with a cigar in my room and spent an hour in meditation.

My first act the next morning was to take in the paper and run my eyes down its first page. There it was, what I sought for, in a prominent position, with a large-lettered and appropriately sensational head-line :

“Accident to Two Leaders of Society, and Robbery of the Duchess of Clayborough ! The horses attached to the brougham of Mrs. Munyon Pyle run away and cause a loss to the

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Duchess of Clayborough of many thousand dollars.

“Last night, as the Duchess of Clayborough, *née* Chiselby, and Mrs. Munyon Pyle, wife of ‘Munny’ Pyle the great Wall Street operator, were returning in the latter’s brougham from some social function, the horses took fright at a fire-engine and became unmanageable. In spite of the most skilful attempts upon the part of the coachman to control them, the animals bolted, and, coming into collision with a hook-and-ladder truck, dashed the brougham to pieces, freeing themselves from the shafts and escaping to parts unknown.

“A crowd quickly collected, and the two ladies were rescued at once from their dangerous positions and an investigation made as to the extent of their injuries. It was found that Mrs. Pyle had merely succumbed to terror, and she was easily restored, but the Duchess of Clayborough had been less fortunate. While escaping serious hurt, her grace’s head had sustained very considerable injuries, which will for a long time leave their marks upon her beautiful countenance.

“More than this, upon her return to the magnificent home of Mrs. Pyle, whose guest she is, the duchess discovered that she had either lost or been robbed of the celebrated string of diamonds that had formed part of her

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attire during the evening, and of which the world has heard so much.

“Late as the hour was, Mrs. Pyle, who is naturally deeply chagrined at the whole affair, caused the police to be notified, and it is hoped that the dastardly scoundrel who took advantage of the hapless lady’s unfortunate plight may be speedily brought to justice. The police are confident of success in the matter.”

I had scarcely concluded the article when I was summoned to the door by the ringing of the electric bell. I found two gentlemen in official dress standing without.

I at once recognized one as being the policeman who had first arrived upon the scene the previous night; but before I could salute him he had made a sign to his comrade, who, stepping forward, clapped upon my wrists a pair of very simply fashioned and unlovely bracelets. Had they been a more novel adornment to my person I had, perhaps, been more mindful of their discomfort. As it was, their contact was similar to the embrace of an old acquaintance.

It is possible for me to impress my features with an enormous variety of expressions, and now I looked simple and surprised amazement and appeared too astonished for words. The officer caught my look, and was evidently somewhat deceived by it.

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"It's for a charge of robbery," he explained, rather apologetically; "and you must come along with us."

"Robbery!" I exclaimed, as innocently as if I had not just finished reading the whole account of it. "Robbery of what?"

He explained briefly, and asserted his intention of searching my rooms and possessions.

I knew I had nothing to fear from this proceeding, and assured him he was at liberty to do so, but begged that while he was engaged in the operation he would allow me to wake my master and explain matters to him.

To this, after locking the outer door and slipping the key into his pocket, he assented. I asked him to free my wrists, that I might assist my master with his toilet, but he absolutely refused to do so, and posted his comrade outside Mr. Jaffrey's chamber to see that I made no attempt to give them the slip. They turned me inside out to assure themselves that the chain was not somewhere upon my person, and then I was allowed to pass into my master's room.

As I crossed the threshold, I drew to the door behind me and then softly and quickly turned the key in the lock. This done, I pulled the heavy portière of pale-green and silver tapestry close over the key-hole and chinks, for I thought that my master, taken thus by sur-

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prise, might be betrayed into some ejaculation or remark which it would be quite as well the confounded rascals outside should not hear. Then I approached the bed and stood for a moment contemplating its occupant.

It is quite singular, I think, how unexpected kindness queers us, sometimes. I remember well that the day when my eyes first fell upon Mr. Jaffrey sitting, the picture of a disgusted, vacant-looking dude, in the jury-box of the —— court-room, I thought to myself, “Well, you are the d—dest apology for a man I ever saw.” If I had had a good chance to do so, I would have rifled his pockets as remorselessly as I would have picked the meat off a grilled bone, and would have kicked aside his carcass with as little compunction as I would have tossed the worthless bone away.

Then he had come out and spoken to me, had treated me like a man and not a scoundrel, had shown an interest in me and offered to help me ; and I had looked at him in sheer wonderment. Then I went to jail, and all the time I was there, serving out my time, I sort of thought over his offer to me, and a queer feeling got into me ; and after I went to bed nights I would keep seeing his face, the face of a fashionable dude, of a tailor’s dummy and a woman’s pal, and I would hear over and over again the tones of his soft, drawling voice,

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until, somehow or other, they grew into me and got to be a part of my life.

I looked down at him now, as he lay there, and wondered more and more at his power over me. He did not look the sort of man who would have much influence over such a devil's scullion as I.

But he was a handsome man ; no one could deny that. As he lay there sleeping as soundly and as innocently as a child, he looked more like a beautiful woman than a man. His skin was as fair and soft as skin could be, tinted with a delicate color which would never become florid. His face was clean-shaven, save for his moustache, and his mouth was most beautifully cut, the lips curved and gentle and guiltless of those marks of sensuality and indulgence which mar so many masculine lips. His lashes were long and curling like a child's, and, as he slept, lay heavily underscoring his closed lids ; and his rather long light hair lay tossed carelessly over a brow as white as a girl's.

As I stood gazing at him I wondered if I had got to leave him for good and all, and if this were the last time I should stand there in that womanish room and render him such vapid service as it would have nauseated me to render any other man.

And—would any one believe it ?—as I stood

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there thinking that, down from my ridiculous face, for the first time in my life, from the eyes of me, Jenkins Hanby, there rolled a great, big drop and fell, before I could stop it, plump on his face. I would not have told this, only it was that which woke him up.

“Why—er, what the devil!” he cried, opening his eyes wide and brushing his hand over his cheek; “raining!”

I had drawn back a step, ashamed of my chicken-heartedness, and, as he spoke, I again advanced to his side.

“It’s I, sir,” I said, respectfully but quickly, making no explanation of the ridiculous folly that had been the means of waking him; then, with a backward motion of the head, “There’s cops in the other room.”

Mr. Jaffrey sprang erect, and a steely spark came into his blue eyes.

“Cops!” he exclaimed. “What do they want here? And you, Hanby, what have you got those twisters on your wrists for?”

He spoke sharp and quick, as he always did under the influence of excitement or emotion.

It took me but a few moments to explain the whole matter to him. When I had finished we looked at each other in dead silence for a minute; then he said,—

“Any proof against you, Hanby?”

“Not a bit, sir,” I replied.

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"You'll have to go with them, I suppose?"

I nodded.

He waited a little, apparently lost in thought, then looked me straight in the eyes and said,—

"Your past character may tell against you. If—if by any chance you should be convicted, I'll see that you are released, Hanby. Understand?"

I sprang forward, understanding only too well.

"No, sir," I cried. "No, sir; don't you do it. There isn't a shadow of evidence against me, excepting that I had the opportunity, and the fact of my past. But if I should get a term for it, what will it matter? You know it's an old story with me, and I don't mind it. Don't you interfere and mix yourself up in it. Now don't, for God's sake, sir!"

He got out of bed and held out his hand to me. Then, seeing that the handcuffs made it impossible for me to respond to his gesture, which, knowing my place well, I would not have done in any case, he changed his intention and laid his hand for a moment on my shoulder, looking down into my eyes with a strange light in his own.

"You are a good little chap, Hanby," he said. "I will see to it that you don't suffer, you may be sure. Now I'll get into my clothes

and see those gentlemen in the other room. You go and show them where the weeds are, and I'll soon appear."

My arrest resulted as I had anticipated it would. Nothing save opportunity could be proved against me. Certain events connected with my past, known to the police, were brought forward as evidence against my character, but Mr. Jaffrey had engaged a skilful lawyer as counsel for me, and it was a simple matter for him to secure my discharge.

After a slight detention, therefore, I was released and permitted to return to the performance of those duties which had grown so agreeable to me, while the police were left to the task of unravelling a mystery which kept their abilities on the stretch for a pretty considerable period.





CHAPTER III

THE woman's name most often bracketed with that of my master in the society journals was that of Leila Caprices, the young wife of a wealthy South American. She had been a New York girl of good birth but little fortune, less remarkable for beauty than for a certain daring originality of style and mode of life, which had gained her some prominence in the social world even before her union with the large fortune of José Caprices.

Since her marriage and the consequent unloosing of those bonds of feminine restraint which are traditionally supposed to hamper somewhat the flights of maidenly aspirations, she had become emancipated with a vengeance. Probably among all the well-aired reports and scandals of metropolitan life no name figured more frequently and conspicuously than did hers. Her reputation was a thing of shreds and patches, yet, like a torn and tattered flag whose very rags make it of greater value to loyal hearts, in the sight of that society of

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which it was so prominent an oriflamme the reputation of Leila Caprices was considerably enhanced by reason of the scars it bore.

Even before her connubial felicity had learned to stand alone, its tender feet had tottered on the brink of the Divorce Court, and, now that time had taught it to march by itself, it trod firmly along the edge of the matrimonial precipice, dreading no tumble, because bulwarked by an unexpected and very considerable legacy from a deceased admirer, whom rumor had selected to be the co-respondent in the case it was anticipating, when that grisly suitor, Death, stepped in and appropriated Leila Caprices' victim for its own.

She had two children,—her “little mistakes” she called them, not by way of fun, but from simple conviction,—charming little creatures, excellently trained and disciplined by the French *bonne* who had had charge of them from their birth, and for whom they felt far more affection than for their mother. I used frequently to come across them in the Park, and often stopped for a little conversation with the woman, who was glad of an opportunity to talk to some one in her own tongue.

She it was who gave me much information about her mistress, whom she detested, and who, she asserted, loved absolutely no one in

the world besides herself and her *caniche*, a wretched little Russian poodle, painfully disfigured by the shears.

The latest fancy of this Supreme Social Success had been my master, not that she cared the snap of her exquisitely manicured little finger about him, but merely because it was her aim to link her name with the latest thing in the way of celebrities. Their connection (a perfectly harmless one, I am sure, as I had free access to their correspondence) was a prolific subject of gossip; and many and varied were the rumors current concerning it.

Singular as it may seem, I had never laid eyes upon the woman, and, as I felt a deep interest in everything which related to my master, I determined to make an opportunity of seeing her. Therefore, having discovered that she was to give a dinner and theatre-party upon a certain evening, I resolved to go to the extravagance of an admission ticket solely for the purpose of satisfying my curiosity in her regard.

The play was "The Second Mrs. Tanqueray," and the house, with the exception of the boxes, was tolerably full at the rise of the curtain. At the fashionable time, midway in the first act, the holders of boxes began to make their languid and noisy appearance. I had secured a position that commanded the

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box which I had learned at the ticket-office had been engaged by Señora Caprices, as, although an American and living in New York, she insisted upon being styled by virtue of her husband's foreign extraction.

It was not until the curtain was going up for the second time that signs of occupancy were visible in the space upon which my eyes were fixed. Suddenly, however, the attention of the audience was diverted from the stage and turned upon the box, into which several conspicuous figures were making a noisy and consequently effective entrance.

It took some moments for these to relieve themselves of their wraps and get seated to their own satisfaction, if not to that of their companions. When, however, this was finally accomplished, I observed that the figures which attracted most notice from that portion of the audience in my immediate vicinity were those of a man and a woman who occupied positions facing, not the stage, but the auditorium.

“Courtice Jaffrey and Leila Caprices!”
“That’s Courtice Jaffrey!” “There’s Leila Caprices!” “You’ve heard of Courtice Jaffrey, the New York dude, the greatest Johnny in America?” “Yes, she was Leila Goldsborough——”

It was this last remark, among the many called forth by the appearance of the Caprices

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party, that made me start forward and gaze even more intently at the box.

Leila Goldsborough ! I have a memory, as I have said before, and few things, from names to the most trivial occurrences, escape it. These five syllables thus placed were perfectly familiar to me, and I easily recalled the circumstance of my becoming acquainted with them.

It was eight years ago when I first heard that name, and in Vienna. I was at that time valet to Lord What's-his-name, whom I have before alluded to, and who was then occupying the post of British ambassador to the Austrian court. Lord What's-his-name had also in his employ a young Englishman acting as private secretary, an attractive young scoundrel who was well calculated to look after his own interests unless dominated by his passions, which were exceedingly keen. Although our positions in his lordship's household were on a very different footing, I was so much more proficient in the many accomplishments that most powerfully appealed to the young secretary's taste that he rather looked up to and courted me.

One day he took me into his confidence respecting his most recent love-affair, and asked me to become witness to a secret marriage between himself and the object of his affections.

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The latter was a young American girl, poor and not even beautiful, a sort of dependant upon a rich aunt with whom she was making a European tour.

I did everything I could to turn him from his purpose, but without result. Something about the girl had completely captivated him, and as, like the late Empress of the French, she was only to be won by the door of the chapel, he had determined to yield to her scruples.

I don't think he had much fear of the result of a marriage ceremony, for he had no prospects, and so nothing to lose should this girl ever make public her claim ; while she, being financially at the mercy of a relative who would most certainly turn her adrift if the fact of a clandestine and ill-advised marriage came to light, had every reason for concealing it.

So these two impulsive young fools, overcome with a mad and senseless passion for each other, were married by the chaplain of a little Church-of-England chapel in Vienna, who had been a school-mate of the groom. And the name of the bride was Leila Goldsborough !

I turned to a gentleman standing beside me.

"Would you be so kind, sir," I requested, "as to allow me to use your glass a moment?"

He nodded good-naturedly, and handed the article to me. I adjusted it to my eyes and looked at the box.

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The woman over whose shoulder my master was leaning was noteworthy ; there could be no doubt on that point. She was rather a small woman,—that is, she was certainly not above the average size,—but her figure was more perfectly proportioned and modelled than that of any other woman I have ever seen. There was not a line or curve about it that one would have had altered. The sleeveless bodice of her black chiffon gown, precariously held in position upon the shoulders by diamond clasps, following the fashion was cut tremendously low, exposing a bust of ivory, and an exquisitely turned neck encircled by a single row of emeralds. As far as her chin all was admirable, but the rest left much to be desired.

Her hair had evidently been subjected to a wash which had changed it from the auburn shade which I remembered into a lifeless yellow, that went badly with a face intended for a different setting. A very beautiful tiara of emeralds rested above the fluffy fringe, and the stones matched in color, though not in shade, the artificially darkened eyes which shone beneath them. Her complexion had been naturally sallow and colorless, but of all physical faults of omission that is, perhaps, the easiest to remedy, and at present a very natural and becoming tint glowed upon Señora Caprices' cheeks.

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Señora Caprices—Leila Goldsborough—Mrs. Edward Rising! A trinity of personalities. What luck to have come across her again! Why, she would be a perfect gold-mine to me, a comfortable support for my old age, a goose that should yield golden eggs whereby I should exist!

Bigamy is an ugly cloud to sail down upon the sunshine of a woman's life. A thousand irregularities of conduct cannot compare with it. A lady of Señora Caprices' position will pay well to avert its shadow.

And how, perhaps you will ask, did I know that this lady had committed so dark a crime as that? Because only the week before I had chanced to read in the *Court Journal*, which Mr. Jaffrey took in, that the Hon. Edward Rising, M.P. for ——shire, and his charming wife Lady Edith, the youngest daughter of Lord What's-his-name, were guests at Great Lodge, Wiltshire. What a conglomeration of coincidences life is, to be sure! I wondered if the Honorable Edward would likewise remember me.

It was about this time that there began to appear in the newspapers certain paragraphs calling attention to the fact that Señora Caprices was being made the victim of a mysterious system of theft. The misfortunes of the lady formed an excellent source of copy for the

journals, and reporters made much of so golden an opportunity. Many persons, knowing Leila Caprices' love of notoriety to be equal to that of the most ambitious actress, shrugged their shoulders at the whole business and denounced it as a "free advertising dodge." Others there were who, being familiar with the jewels asserted to have been stolen, and noting that they were, indeed, no longer to be seen adorning the lady's toilet, believed that they were, in fact, missing from her possession, but, winking knowingly at one another, suggested that the times were hard, money was tight, investments had depreciated, and the Señora's income might be inadequate to cope with the whims of so notoriously extravagant a woman as its mistress.

Here and there might be found a few credulous fools simple enough to believe that on an average of once a week an article of great value could be stolen from an exceedingly clever and wide-awake woman, leaving her completely in the dark as to the thief.

I heard a number of gentlemen discussing the affair in my master's smoking-room, one night, while I was serving them with champagne, opened by Mr. Jaffrey in payment of some lost wager. Knowing what I did, I could not help laughing in my sleeve at the wild and various guesses they made as to the solution

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of the mystery. The subject had been started by one of the men, apropos of a sensational paragraph in the morning *Report* announcing a fresh loss to Señora Caprices.

“Weren’t you with her last night, Courty?” a man asked, after many opinions had been hazarded and demolished.

Mr. Jaffrey, who had changed his evening coat for a lounging-jacket of violet velvet turned out with black satin, was leaning back wearily in a deep-seated Morris chair. He was smoking a scented cigarette, and had, up to now, been merely a listener to the dialogue of the others.

He had not seemed himself since reading a note that had been brought by a liveried flunky while I was dressing him, late that afternoon. I noticed that he went very white while reading it, and he had ordered me to substitute the Tuxedo for the claw-hammer which I was holding ready for him to put on.

“I shall not go out to-night, Hanby,” he had said, but, after a moment’s consideration, had again changed his mind and kept his engagement. He was to dine with some gentlemen at the Union League Club.

He now nodded his head lazily.

“Er—yes,” he drawled, as if the subject bored him.

“Did you notice that she wore this particular

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pin about her? You're such a cuss for observing the details of a woman's dress!"

Again my master nodded.

"Well, what do you suppose became of it? Got any theory?"

Mr. Jaffrey shook his head.

"Well, it's damned queer," one of the other men ejaculated.

"Yes, a case for Sherlock Holmes," said another. "I'd give considerable to know where that pin is: wouldn't you?"

The others grunted assent. My master opened his eyes and dropped the end of his cigarette into a wrought-iron cuspidor which stood beside him. Then he took out a scented handkerchief and passed it once or twice across his lips to dissipate the odor of tobacco from his fair moustache. Replacing it in his pocket, he rested his elbows upon the cushioned arms of the chair, joined together his immaculate finger-tips, and then remarked,—

"How-er—how much would you give, Billy? 'Considerable' is so-er—so vague, don't you know?"

Mr. Bettall, the man he called "Billy," feeling that his money was pretty safe, became bold.

"Oh, I'd give a hundred dollars, easy. The reward would cover that, you know."

"But-er if the information could not be

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used to—er—to secure the reward, don't you know?"

"Then for the mere satisfaction of knowing, egad!" the other returned, and applied himself to his champagne.

I was at that moment filling my master's glass, and he took advantage of the occasion to give me a few words of direction in a low voice. I left the room to obey his order, and returned almost immediately, holding in my hand a small pasteboard jeweller's box, which I delivered to him.

The men stared. No one thought he had any particular reason for questioning the sincerity of Mr. Bettall's offer. Holding the little box in his hand, he turned to the latter.

"Billy," he said, "do you—er—do you want to back down?"

"Not I," returned Bettall, stoutly, although the astonishment upon his dark little face was so profound as to be almost comical.

"Well, then—er, gentlemen, here's the pin," said my master, rising languidly and lifting the cover from the tiny box.

A general exclamation naturally followed upon the announcement. The men rose and pressed around Mr. Jaffrey, curiosity and surprise upon every face and interrogation in every eye. Their vocal utterances were rather too profane for repetition.

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My master handed the box to Mr. Bettall, who examined the pin curiously for some moments and then passed it to another man, and so it went from hand to hand, each gentleman in turn making his comments upon it.

It was an ornament which appeared to be of great value, though small in size ; in shape a star, of which a very large ruby formed the centre and diamonds of fair size the points.

As it reached the last man in the group, he took it from the box and held it close to the flame of a lamp which burned upon a side table. As he replaced it in its plain and unworthy case Mr. Jaffrey addressed him :

“Well—er, Bellew, what do you think of it?”

Mr. Bellew laughed :

“Oh, the diamonds are all right, I guess.”

“The diamonds !” one or two ejaculated, while others pressed my master for an explanation of the circumstance of the pin being in his possession.

Mr. Jaffrey smiled, showing his even, white teeth beneath his moustache.

“Bellew has remarked what the pawnbroker, at whose shop I found it, had also—er discovered ; that the—er supposed ruby is only a bit of—er—of glass. Eh—er, Bellew?”

Mr. Bellew, a connoisseur in gems, nodded.

“And you found the thing——?” Bettall interposed, eagerly.

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“At—well—er, I won’t say where, for the lady who presides over the establishment is—er exceedingly solicitous of its reputation, as she—er does not wish to be considered a receiver of—er stolen goods. She—er pledged me to—er secrecy before delivering over the—er—the pin; and as—er I am going to amuse myself by studying up this case with a view to—er finding the Señora’s other jewels, if, that is, if—er she wants them found, you understand, I—er—I am willing to preserve silence upon the point.”

“Then you *have* some theory?” Mr. Bettall repeated.

My master again shook his head.

“But you must have, or you wouldn’t think of following up this clue,” the other insisted.

Mr. Jaffrey gazed for a moment at the tip of his varnished boot, whose polished surface was marred by a little rift that seemed to bespeak a crack. A pained expression, as of one detected in a misdemeanor, crossed his face, and he raised his eyes reproachfully to mine, as if he would chide me for having allowed him to commit such an outrage upon decency as to wear boots verging, in ever so slight a degree, upon shabbiness. It was the look of one disappointed in a trust, and it went straight to my heart. Then he replied to his friend :

“No—er, Billy, I have no theory. You form

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a theory if you are in a condition of—er uncertainty ; now—er, I am not in a condition of—er uncertainty as to the person who—er has relieved Madame Caprices of her jewels ; I am in a state of positive—er knowledge. You—er note the distinction, I—er trust ?”

A universal exclamation of astonishment followed upon this statement. The general surprise was so intense that no expressions were found adequate to voice it, save those emphasized by allusions to the highest powers of good and evil and the places of their enthronement. Indeed, it was evident that my master had aroused a high degree of excitement in his guests.

Mr. Jaffrey smiled, and yet his smile was not exactly an expression of mirth or amusement. There was in it, to me at least, a sort of undercurrent of sadness. Just how the eagerness of his guests struck him I do not know, of course, but as I looked at their animated, excited faces I could think of nothing but a pack of fox-hounds who have just got the scent. They looked hungry, cruel, and alert, as if a social malefactor would fare badly among them if they struck his trail.

“I cannot satisfy your curiosity, gentlemen,” my master said, when the babel of voices ceased. “I wish—er first to unearth the rest of the jewels. But—er I don’t doubt that in good

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time the-er identity of the-er—the-er——” he hesitated a moment longer than usual over the word, and then continued,—“thief will be-er disclosed, and then I-er can promise you a sensation. You will be as much-er surprised, gentlemen, I-er—I assure you, as if the perpetrator turned out to be-er—to be-er—well, myself, let us say.”

I looked at Mr. Jaffrey in blank amazement, wondering whether he was drunk or crazy; gone clean off his head, I thought he must be. It is such an easy thing to arouse suspicion, sometimes a mere look will do it; and then to lay it again is a mighty difficult matter, I can tell you, for I have proved it in my own experience.

A look of disappointment settled on the gentlemen's faces.

“Oh, pshaw, Courty!” said Mr. Key: “what in thunder did you work us up so for? I feel like a balloon which has been pricked.”

“And I, like a damned inquisitive female,” remarked Mr. Bettall. “Say, Courty, I’ll be hanged if I won’t offer you another hundred to satisfy our curiosity.”

But Mr. Jaffrey declined the offer. His face grew rather grave, and I, being behind the scenes, fancied (it may have been merely fancy, I don’t know) that I saw a shade of wistfulness creep into his blue eyes.

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"No, Billy," he said, with more decision than his drawl usually conveyed, "not yet; you'll know all in—er good time." Then he turned to me: "Here, Hanby," he ordered, "er—fill up the gentlemen's glasses."

I obeyed, while he, holding his own as yet untasted glass in his hand, rose, standing a tall, slender, foppishly clad and yet distinguished-looking figure among his guests.

"Er—fellows," he began, "the man who has—er robbed Madame Caprices of her jewels is a man whom—er you all know well. He has dined with you, er—ridden with you, smoked with you, and—er lived among you. He—er is a member of your clubs; you have—er entertained him and he—er has entertained you. You have—er in fact thought him a good fellow, and—er considered him a friend. Now, gentlemen, you are going to be undeceived in your estimate of him. You have believed him—er an honest man, he will be proved to you a—er criminal; you have considered him an equal, he will be proved to you an inferior; you have thought him a gentleman, he will be proved to you a—er—a cad. Now—er, gentlemen, I know this man better than—er any of you; I have known him all his life, and know what a—er cursed up-hill struggle his—er—his youth was. I—er don't wish to try to extenuate his guilt or to—er in any way make excuses for such damned

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double-dealing as his. I—er abhor it as much as—er any of you can ; but one thing, and—er one thing only, I do want to say in his favor, and that is, that this man, who to-morrow possibly may be under the ban of your scorn, and—er contempt, who has for ten years led a life of fraud and deceit, has never (I can swear this, gentlemen, for he has opened his heart to me, and I have every reason to believe his statement) robbed a being who could not well afford to lose what he has taken, and that two-thirds, at least, of his ill-gotten gains have gone to the relief of the poor and destitute. The persons who have suffered from his depredations are persons who have—er no bowels of compassion ; who—er never extend a helping hand to the unfortunate, and who are amply able to—er spare the amount which he has—er—has appropriated without their permission. Yet, gentlemen, although this social highwayman has thus discriminated in his methods, and has, perhaps, by reason of his nefarious career been able to help many a lame dog over a stile, I do not wish to imply that I consider his course anything but reprehensible. It is only that I, feeling his—er—his jig to be about up, and compassionating the poor devil from the bottom of my heart, would ask you and—er those whom you may be able to influence, to be as lenient in your judgment as you can. I assure you

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this—er—this unfortunate man will have enough to bear without your—er—your utter condemnation.”

He paused and scanned earnestly the faces around him. Their expressions were similar, and betokened surprise, dismay, and consternation, but scarcely pity or sympathy for the subject of Mr. Jaffrey’s little discourse. Indeed, lenient judgment concerning this social Iscariot could scarcely be expected from them.

My master evidently shared my interpretation of the common sentiment which possessed his guests, for his own face, which had softened somewhat under the influence of his words, suddenly grew hard and bitter. He raised his glass.

“Gentlemen,” he said, “to-morrow morning I am going to try to soften Madame Caprices’ heart. I am going to ask her to—er—to let up on the fellow and not expose him. Here’s to my good luck! Who will join me in the—er desire to give this poor devil another chance?”

There was a pause. Not a man rose; one or two coughed and cleared their throats nervously. Mr. Jaffrey smiled, with his lips only; his eyes remained sad and bitter.

“I must drink alone, then,” he said, and placed the glass to his lips; but before he had

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drunk a drop of its contents Gordon Key rose to his feet.

“Curse it all, Courty !” he exclaimed, “I don’t know that any of us care much about having a scoundrelly thief at large among us, but I’ll be hanged if I like to sit here and see you the only man-jack of us willing to give the chap a helping hand. I’ll drink with you to your success with Leila Caprices, but with the understanding that if you persuade her to silence you give us the name of the man who has so successfully imposed upon us all.”

My master again lowered his glass.

“And so socially boycott him ?” he asked. “Which of you would notice him or associate with him if I were to reveal his identity ?”

Mr. Key pulled his very slight dark moustache.

“It’s a devilish uncomfortable business !” he said, and looked inquiringly around upon the other men, who were conversing among themselves in subdued tones. Suddenly Mr. Bettall, who was a bright, cheery little fellow, with a reputation for extreme good-nature, and who was very fond of my master, offered a suggestion :

“I say, Courty, you’ll excuse my saying so, but I think it would have been a hanged sight better, you know, if you had held your tongue in this matter, as you didn’t mean to reveal the

fellow's name. I think, you know, that he ought to be expelled the clubs, and that, and so do the others. But, as long as you are determined to give him another show and we can't help ourselves, why, if you can persuade Leila Caprices to keep mum on the subject, we think you ought to exact from the man, whoever he is, an oath of reformation."

Mr. Jaffrey nodded. He looked white and tired.

"I-er fancy Madame Caprices will make such a promise a condition of her silence," he returned, with a resumption of his old languid manner.

Mr. Bettall rose, and the rest followed his example.

"Then, Courty, we will drink with you," he said, affectionately; "not so much because we really approve your purpose and wish you success in it, as that we are all so fond of you and hate to oppose you in any way, old man."

The glasses were emptied, all but my master's, though no one save myself observed, so marvellous was his sleight of hand, that the contents of his wineglass were emptied into his handkerchief and that dropped softly into the iron cuspidor. So curious were his notions of honor that I am sure, had his life depended upon his drinking that toast which was really

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pledged by those men to their affectionate regard for himself, it would have been utterly impossible for him to swallow a drop.

And a little later, when his guests were leaving, as I helped them on with their top-coats I noticed that easily and skilfully, so naturally that not one among them suspected his motive, he evaded taking in his the hands which they extended in farewell. When he returned from seeing them into the lift I noticed how white and done-up he looked.

“Put out the lights and go to bed, Hanby,” he said, in a hollow voice : “I’ll see to myself to-night.”

He went into the den and closed the door behind him. I cleared the dining-room table, put out the lights, excepting one jet in the drawing-room and those in Mr. Jaffrey’s bed-chamber, and then retired to my own little sitting-room, where, with the door open wide, I sat and listened for sounds which should indicate that my master was retiring.

I waited a long and weary while. One struck, then the half; two, and the half; three, and on the chime of the half I heard the sounds for which I was listening. Slow, languid steps crossed the floor of the drawing-room, my master’s chamber door was softly opened (he was very quiet and gentle always in his movements) and as softly closed again, and I knew

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that the coast was clear for me to make the investigations I was bent on.

I wanted to discover the note which had come for Mr. Jaffrey that afternoon. I was convinced that it contained the clue to the change which had come over him. I believed that it was from Edward Rising's wife, and that she held in her possession a terrible secret which threatened completely to wind up my master's prosperous career.

Well, intimidation is a game that can be played by any number of persons who have the wherewithal to buy chips, and I was pretty sure that I held cards which would knock spots out of those held by Madame Caprices. But I couldn't ante up until I found that letter.

It might be that I was mistaken in its origin and purport, and if so the visit which I meditated paying the lady was the last thing in the world I should wish to do. It was possible that my master had been playing a simple game of bluff that evening, and that Madame Caprices was still in the dark as to the identity of the man who had robbed her. It might be that Mr. Jaffrey was menaced from other quarters, and, if so, to show my hand to my adversary would be of no avail, while it would very likely deprive me of the opportunity of largely increasing my own fortune.

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I stole like a cat through the dark dining-room and through the partially drawn portières into the drawing-room. Approaching my master's door, I stood a couple of minutes shrouded in the draperies, lest he should suddenly open it and discover me listening. I heard not a sound within. Indeed, the silence seemed ominous, for, being as dainty as a woman about his toilet, I knew he could not yet have finished his preparations for the night.

As I stood there in the black darkness and utter stillness, there suddenly came to my ears a little phrase, simple and commonplace, yet more eloquent than any prayer or supplication I have ever heard—and I have been to Methodist revivals and Salvation Army meetings no end. It was no common exclamation, but the despairing cry of a man in extremity, of a man suffering not so much for himself as for one dearly beloved, for whose protection his strength had proved deficient.

“God help her !” The words came hoarse and labored ; then a sound that made my heart stand still : a click, the cocking of a revolver.

I did not hesitate an instant. I threw open the door and entered the room. He was standing before his toilet-table in his shirt-sleeves. As I suddenly appeared upon the threshold I saw him drop his right arm and lay something (what, it was easy enough to guess) on the table,

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nervously throwing over it a handkerchief which lay near by.

"I beg pardon, sir," I said, in my usual quiet manner, for I have faced a good many emergencies in my life ; "you called me, I believe?"

He shook his head ; even in this great crisis his courtesy did not desert him.

"No, Hanby," he replied. "Go to bed : it's late."

"Not too late, sir, for me to help you," I said, boldly entering the room. "You look terribly fagged, sir ; let me make you comfortable for the night."

He gave a short, hollow laugh.

"Comfortable !" he ejaculated. "You're a clever little chap, Hanby, but even you could not do that."

"Indeed, sir, I'm not so sure that I couldn't," I returned, pointedly.

He had fallen into a chair, as if completely done up, and had dropped his head against the cushioned back and closed his eyes. His face looked like a white mask.

"I say, Hanby," he said, quite ignoring my remark, "get me a pick-me-up of some sort, will you? A peg of brandy will do."

I thought that possibly his wish was to get me out of the way that he might finish his infernal business, but I had no intention of

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leaving the room while that ugly implement lay among the silver furnishings of his toilet, like a curse among compliments.

“Yes, sir,” I replied, “directly, sir.”

He opened his eyes and looked at me sharply.

“Directly, Hanby!” he repeated, being accustomed to the promptest service from me.

“And why not at once?” frowning impatiently. Then, regarding me more narrowly, “What’s the matter, Hanby? You in trouble too?”

Now, I ask you, is there one man in a thousand who, being in my master’s desperate strait, would have any consideration to spare for his servant? But that was Mr. Jaffrey all over. No matter how mountainous his own troubles were, they never hid from his sight the little hills of difficulty which lay in the paths of other people.

I heaved a sigh. “Yes, sir,” I answered.

“What is it? Anything I can help you about? If so, speak out, man.”

“Well, sir,” I returned, chuckling to myself as I saw the color beginning to return to his face, “I should very much like your advice, if it won’t trouble you too much to hear a little story. I’ve got a secret that belongs to another person—other persons, I should say—weighing heavily upon me, sir, and I don’t know just what I ought to do about it.”

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"All right. Go on : I am listening."

But I don't really think he was during the first part of my story, the story of my acquaintance with Edward Rising and the part I had played as witness to his marriage. His eyes were closed again, and I am sure his mind was wandering to his own affairs. But when, suddenly, I mentioned the name of the woman whom the young Englishman had married, I saw him start and open his eyes.

"What's that you say?" he asked, just as one who has been dozing during a drowsy sermon suddenly awakes to an interesting point in the discourse. "What had Miss Leila Goldsborough to do with the affair?"

"A good deal, sir," I returned. "She it was who married the young fellow."

"What?"

There was no doubt now that his interest was thoroughly aroused.

"Yes, sir," I repeated : "I was witness to the business."

"Do you know who that lady now is?"

"Yes, sir : she is called Señora Caprices."

"Called ! She *is* Señora Caprices."

"Beg pardon, sir ; she is Mrs. Edward Rising."

His face was red, crimson now, and he leaned forward, grasping the arms of his chair and looking me eagerly in the face. It was

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obvious of how much value this information was to him.

"See here, Hanby," he said, quickly, "this is a grave charge you are bringing against a lady of Señora Caprices' position: do you know it?"

I nodded. "Bigamy, sir," I remarked, quietly.

"It's an ugly word," he continued, "and severely punishable by law."

"So it is, sir. A lady would sacrifice a good deal, *all* her jewels, I should think, rather than have it come to light."

My master gave a little cry and rose from his chair. His eyes shone, his face glowed, and the contrast between his present appearance and that he had borne when I entered the room was as marked as that between a worn-out hack and a thoroughbred race-horse.

"Good God, Hanby!" he cried, "are you sure of this—absolutely?"

"Absolutely, sir."

"You know the man to be living?"

"He was a couple of weeks ago."

"Then this—this—why, this is salvation, man, this secret of yours! Hanby, do you know what this is worth to me?" His face was all knotted up with emotion; I should never have recognized it.

"I suspect, sir."

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He plunged his hands into the depths of his pockets, with the involuntary movement of one searching for money.

"How much—how much do you want for it, Hanby?" he cried, eagerly.

"Nothing, sir."

His face fell. "Nothing! You will not sell it?"

I shook my head. "No, sir; I will not sell it."

"For the love of God, Hanby, sell it to me!"

I took a step toward him. I fancy some of the feeling I had for him showed in my face.

"For the love of you, I give it to you, sir," I said, briefly.

He sprang at me and grasped me by the shoulders, and we looked for a moment full into each other's eyes. I don't think either of us thought much about talking for a couple of minutes or so. Then he dropped his hold of me and grasped my right hand in his.

"You have more than saved my life, Hanby," he said, simply. "I don't see why you should do it."

I made no reply, but turned my back on him and pretended to busy myself about the toilet-table. Then I remembered his request for a peg and left the room to fulfil it, first slipping into my pocket the superfluous orna-

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ment to his dressing-table, which I proceeded to uncock directly I was on the other side of the door.

He was too abstracted to notice my movements ; indeed, he scarcely observed them, for he had wandered over to the fireplace after releasing me, and was standing, with his hands still in his trousers-pockets, planted squarely upon the rug in front of the andirons, gazing vacantly into the empty space before him.

I was not gone from the room above ten minutes, but when I returned with the brandy I was surprised and shocked to see that all the brightness and animation had again died out of his face.

“What is it, sir, if I may be so bold as to ask ?” I inquired, as I offered him the tray.

He seized the glass and drained it.

“I can’t do it, Hanby,” he said, looking at me with dull, miserable eyes.

“Can’t do what, sir ?”

“Threaten a woman,” he replied. “It’s too low ; only a coward would do that.”

I made a gesture of disgust. It was a liberty, I know, but I could not help it.

“Pshaw, sir !” I exclaimed. “If a woman threatens you——”

“She has a right to do so ; I have none.”

“The right of morality, sir,” I urged.

He smiled in spite of his trouble.

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“A singular apostle of morality, I, Hanby. No, no ; the game is up. I’ve lost, and must bear my losses like a man, or, to be consistent to the last, cheat my creditors like a cowardly dude.” He cast an involuntary glance toward the dressing-table.

I placed the little tray on the chimney-piece and turned upon him, not in the attitude of servant to master, but in that of man to man.

“Mr. Jaffrey, sir,” I said, “you shan’t throw yourself and your life away like that ; there are too many fond of you, sir, to have it.”

He laughed. “Not so many, Hanby,” he returned. “I tested the feelings of my most intimate friends pretty thoroughly, to-night.”

“It was a dangerous thing to do, sir,” I said. “Why did you do it?”

“To feel the pulse of the market, Hanby. A popular stock has depreciated ; will its old supporters, recognizing some inherent value in it, stand by and inflate it again, or, forgetting their former estimate of its qualities, let it drop out of sight, its downward pace facilitated by their unfriendly attitude? That was what I wanted to discover, my man ; and, ’faith, I discovered it.”

“But there are others, sir,” I urged.

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He glanced quickly at me. "Who?" he asked.

"Why—myself, sir, for one, and—er—er——" I hesitated, not knowing just how he would take it, then bolted out, "and the lady up at Seventy-First Street, sir."

He drew a deep, quick breath.

"God!" he exclaimed, "don't remind me of her!"

"But I will, sir," I persisted. "You have a right to consider her, sir."

He turned fiercely upon me.

"Do you think, then, that I haven't considered her? Humph!"—laughing sarcastically: "little you know about it, after all, Hanby."

I saw that it was folly to argue any longer with him, and an idea had come into my head that I meant to carry into effect.

"See here, sir," I said; "it's very late, and we can do no good talking any more to-night. Let me put you to bed, sir, and you just go to sleep and think no more about this matter. Leave it all to me, sir. I've helped myself out of worse scrapes than this. At all events, it won't do any good to worry more to-night. Come, sir, do oblige me, if you please."

I think he was really glad to be taken in hand and dictated to like a child. He allowed me to have my way with him, and I soon had

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the satisfaction of seeing him comfortably established in bed, and had no doubt that, as he was always an excellent sleeper, the reaction from so much excitement would cause him to sleep late into the morning. At least I hoped so, for I had business to do which, if he waked early, would hinder my assisting him with his toilet.





CHAPTER IV

THE next morning about nine o'clock I presented myself at the house of Señor José Caprices. I knew the hour to be unfashionably early for a gentleman to pay visits to a lady, but then I do not consider myself a gentleman, nor, indeed, is Madame Caprices my notion of a lady. Besides which, my business with her was urgent, and did not admit of the consideration of etiquette.

The flunky who came to the door looked at me as if I were a lunatic when I asked for his mistress.

"Madame Caprices won't be up for two hours yet," he said, as if he would like to add, "Confound you for a fool to expect anything else."

"Won't she?" I returned, coolly. "Well, just send this card up to her by her maid and see if you haven't made a mistake."

I handed him a card. On it I had written, "Jenkins Hanby, late valet to Lord What's-his-name," and in the lower left-hand corner,

“Vienna,” and the day and year of her marriage to Edward Rising, followed by the word “Immediate” heavily underscored.

The fellow hesitated a moment longer, and then departed, to return shortly round-eyed with amazement.

“Madame will see you directly. She wants you to come up to her boudoir.” And he conducted me thither, staring at me the while as if trying to discover in my appearance some evidence of the magic which had worked such wonderful compliance in his mistress.

I was not kept waiting long. Probably the unpretentiousness of my social position had caused Madame Caprices to feel it unnecessary to make an elaborate toilet; then, too, I do not doubt that alarm and apprehension had made her hasten her preparations. At all events, she was decidedly not at her best when she presented herself to my view at the expiration of perhaps fifteen minutes.

She was enveloped in a sort of loose, gray wrapper; her hair was knotted into a careless and scanty coil on her neck, and she had not waited for her maid to put those touches to her complexion on which her appearance was so largely dependent. She looked sallow, faded, and decidedly plain.

As she came forward there was a set and determined expression about her mouth, in

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spite of an apparent nervousness of manner, that bespoke a resolution to deny and defy as long as possible all knowledge of the business which my significant card indicated.

"You wished to see me, I believe," she began, with an evident effort to appear calm and unconcerned and to steady the voice which would shake a little ; then, before I could reply, I observed her whole countenance change ; every muscle of it relaxed, and a look of the most utter relief ushered the haggard fear from her eyes. "Why, you are Mr. Jaffrey's man, are you not?"

I saw that it had occurred to her that her apprehensions had been too quickly aroused, —that the allusion to Lord What's-his-name upon my card was probably intended simply as a reference of past service, and that the date was merely a coincidence. It was scarcely to be supposed that she would remember my face, for if she had seen me at all upon her wedding-day the chances were that she had not noted my appearance sufficiently to cause her to recall it as associated with that occasion.

I bowed respectfully.

"Yes, madame."

Her face grew cold and hard. "God help the poor devil," I thought, "who might seek mercy at her hands!"

"Your master has taken a good deal upon

himself, I should say, to require my rising at this hour in the morning for his own purposes."

I dissembled a little. I wished to learn just how fully possessed she was of my master's unhappy secret, and how she had discovered it.

"But, madame," I remonstrated, propitiatingly, "Mr. Jaffrey's purposes are such urgent ones."

She eyed me sharply.

"You appear to be in his confidence," she remarked.

"He has so far honored me," I replied.

She laughed sarcastically.

"I am glad you consider it an honor to have such secrets shared with you," she remarked. Then, suddenly, "You bring me a packet from him, perhaps?" she asked.

I shook my head. "No, madame."

Her face grew angry and her voice shrill. She was of the vixenish type of woman.

"Why did not your master come himself, as I directed him to do? This is no matter for a go-between."

"He will come later, madame. I came simply to desire you not to move in the affair until he should see you."

"Then you have come on a fool's errand," she replied, rather coarsely. "Tell your master, since you share his honored confidence,

that I allowed him twenty-four hours in which to return my jewels and leave the country, and I do not mean to extend the time one instant. I have taken precautions against his escaping without my leave, and now, as he has failed to avail himself of the opportunity which I offered him of returning his stolen goods, I shall let the law have its way with him."

I looked at her keenly. I wondered if she really had any proof against him, or if her accusations were not based wholly on mere suspicion. She seemed to me to be of too hasty and violent a temperament to allow a man much leeway if she had sufficient evidence that he had robbed her, and I could reconcile her disposition, as I read it, with her willingness to temporize in this way, only on the grounds either of insufficiency of proof or of her recognition of some hold my master might have upon her.

"Pardon me, madame," I said, deprecatingly, "if I venture to remind you that, unless you can substantiate your charge against Mr. Jaffrey, to accuse a man in his position of being a common thief is not only to bring upon yourself the ridicule and denunciation of the general public, but also to make yourself liable for heavy damages in a libel suit."

She raised her head haughtily and surveyed me with disdain.

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“Pray,” she exclaimed, “did your master send you to me in the capacity of legal adviser? If not, allow me to tell you, my good man, that you are taking unwarrantable liberties. I do not think better evidence against him is required than my own oath that I felt him take the pin from the breast of my gown, that he was with me upon every occasion when I have been robbed, and that no other person than he has had opportunity to deprive me of my jewels. Now,” she continued, “you may go and tell your master that he has gained nothing, has, indeed, merely strengthened my determination, by sending you here. His reprieve will be up at eleven o’clock : I allow him not one minute’s grace.”

She was sweeping toward the bell, evidently meaning to ring and have me shown out, when I stopped her, courteously, but briefly and with decision.

“One moment, Mrs. Rising—oh, Señora Caprices,” I said, as if hastily correcting a mistake : “perhaps it has not occurred to you that certain crimes may invalidate an oath. For instance, madame, the law would scarcely place much value upon the oath of a person guilty of murder, arson, theft, or even—bigamy.”

She dropped her outstretched hand, and I saw her shrink all together. Her back was to me, but I knew that my bolt had been run

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home. I waited a moment for her to reply, but as she did not do so I approached her.

"Shall we not discuss the matter a little further, madame?" I asked, gently and persuasively.

She flashed round a glance at me, and I saw how white her face was.

"Who are you?" she asked, hoarsely.

"You had my card, madame," I said, deferentially.

She sank into a chair and sat fumbling with the folds of her dress and looking straight before her at the ground. Never a large woman, she now seemed shrunk to half her usual size, and looked old and thin. All her fine bravado and air of consequence had faded away. I stood silently and respectfully at a little distance, waiting for her to recover herself.

In a few moments she looked up and spoke. after one or two attempts to clear her throat.

"Were you a witness?" she asked.

"Yes, madame."

"We both thought you dead." It was as though she were muttering to herself. I gathered from the plural pronoun that the two contracting parties had, later on, entered into a mutual agreement of silence and separation.

I smiled. "'Bad pennies,' you know, madame."

Evidently my nonchalance aroused her an-

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ger. A flush darkened her pale skin and a thrill of passion warmed her tones.

"It is no jesting matter," she cried.

"My own thought, madame. Serious enough, in all conscience."

There was again a brief pause. Then Señora Caprices suddenly rose and confronted me. She had gathered together all her energies, and no general leading a forlorn hope ever showed himself more resolute and undaunted than did this slight, fragile woman, menaced by the threatened betrayal of her complicity in a crime whose discovery to the world would mean the absolute ruin and destruction of her life. I could not but admire her.

"How much do you want?" she asked, steadily.

I looked at her as if in surprise.

"How much what, madame?"

"Hush-money."

I looked hurt, aggrieved. "Not a cent, madame."

"Then, what?"

"I am come, madame, to endeavor to induce you to follow one of the great precepts of morality, to persuade you to practise the greatest law of life, to beseech you to obey the Golden Rule. You remember it? Allow me to refresh your memory. It is worded something like this: 'Do unto others as you would have others

do unto you.' My object is a virtuous one, you see. There can be no suggestion of blackmail in seeking to make a fellow-being apply a great moral law to one of the exigencies of life."

I think she would have liked to annihilate me for thus playing with her, and, indeed, I am almost inclined to regret indulging the feline instinct which made me wantonly torture my victim. The mouse was such a brave little mouse; she made no moan, but faced me steadily.

"You propose an exchange of secrets?"

"Well, something of that nature, madame. I would have put it less harshly. I should have said we would both practise forgiveness. You forgive my master, and I forgive you."

"Which means that I shall lose my jewels forever? Let him return the jewels, and I will hush the matter up."

I shook my head. "It is impossible for him to do so; they are long since disposed of. Better lose a few jewels than everything else in life worth having."

She bit her lips and reflected. Then,—

"This is to cover the whole price of your silence," she said; "otherwise I will make no compromise. I refuse to make this the first concession in a blackmailing game. I would

rather sacrifice everything now than live a life of apprehension."

"Hm!" I returned, and paused to consider. I believed that what she said she meant. She was of the calibre to prefer instant death to prolonged torture. But I had not foreseen that the salvation of my master would entail such a considerable sacrifice of my own hopes. I had not thought that to feed his tranquillity I must kill my golden goose. I had anticipated presenting him with the first egg she should lay, expecting to nourish myself with many subsequent ones which I should cause her to yield. My bright visions of future competence would be shattered if I clung to my purpose of saving him. Was I really so much in his debt as I fancied, or was I merely the victim of a sentimental mania, a sort of morbid disease, convalescence from which would cause me to regret acts of folly which I had committed during its dominion over me?

All of a sudden, while I was reasoning with myself like this, it seemed as if a curtain shut out from my sight the room in which I was standing, and another scene rose in its place. It was not nearly as agreeable a vision. It was a corridor in the — court-house. I could see it distinctly. I also recognized plainly three figures standing in its shadow, those of a policeman, a clude, and a con-

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demned, disreputable jail-bird. A curious trio ! For a moment the drawl of a soft, languid voice rang in my ears, and then the vision faded away, and I turned to Madame Caprices.

"Very well," I said, dropping my former sarcasm ; "it shall be as you say. Give up the idea of prosecuting my master, and you shall be free from any further persecution at my hands."

"How can I be sure of this?" she asked, in a business-like tone. "There is no way by which I can secure myself."

"There is a way," I replied, after considering a moment. "You give me a paper acknowledging your marriage ; Mr. Jaffrey gives you one acknowledging his theft——"

"And you?" she said, eagerly, as I hesitated.

"Oh, I? Well, Mr. Jaffrey has a hold upon me ; I give him a paper confessing this. It is a sort of triangular security, you see. Each one of us is interested in preserving the secret of the other two. You blow on Mr. Jaffrey, I give you away, and he gives me away. If I give you away, then you give Mr. Jaffrey away, and he gives me away. If Mr. Jaffrey blows—but no, I don't think we need consider that : he's not that sort."

Madame Caprices heaved a sigh of relief. I fancy she thought she had gotten out of a

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bad scrape pretty cheap. Then she looked at me a little curiously.

"You seem to concern yourself very singularly in Mr. Jaffrey's affairs :—why?"

"I told you : he has a hold upon me," I replied.

"He is a very curious man," she said. "His is a most peculiar influence. I was a fool not to cause his arrest immediately I discovered that it was he who had robbed me."

"And you did not, madame :—why?" I asked, echoing her query, for I wished to satisfy my curiosity upon this point.

She had reseated herself now, and reaction from her late fear and uncertainty had robbed her face of that withered look of age it had taken on at the discovery of my identity. She looked ten years younger, and was apparently so relieved at having laid the horrid spectre whose sudden appearance had so scared her, that she could regard unresentfully the ogre who had called it up, and was even willing to converse upon friendly terms with him.

"Why?" she repeated, musingly. "I cannot say ; a woman's reason, I suppose. I liked the man, couldn't believe it of him at first, and wanted to give him a chance to return the jewels and evade the law. We women are fools. And he, too," she went on, angrily,—
"he, too, is a fool. Why didn't he return the

things, as I gave him the opportunity of doing?"

"He has disposed of them, madame," I replied.

"Has he sold them?"

"That I cannot say."

"Oh! then he does not take you fully into his confidence?"

"No, madame."

A look of satisfaction crossed her face, and my suspicions were confirmed that my master knew of certain events in Madame Caprices' career which my lady was not eager to have disclosed to the world.

I had given as much time to this interview as I was willing to spare from Mr. Jaffrey. I knew not what might be going on at home, and was anxious to return thither. A dainty buhl desk stood in one corner of the boudoir, amply provided with writing materials: I made a motion toward it, and said,—

"Will you permit me, madame?"

She nodded, and I wrote out the following lines on a sheet of paper stamped with the crest of Señor José Caprices:

"I, Leila Goldsborough Rising, commonly known as Señora Caprices, do hereby acknowledge that upon the eighteenth day of March, 188—, I was married to Edward Rising in the English Chapel of ———, at Vienna; that on the

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day of at the church of ,
in the city of New York, my husband Edward
Rising being still living, to my absolute knowl-
edge, I did marry Señor José Caprices, and
that I have since lived with him as his lawful
wife. I do, therefore, herein confess to having
thereby, consciously and with premeditation,
committed the crime of bigamy, and hereto I
sign my name in the presence of the following
witnesses."

I carried the paper over to her.

"Be pleased to read this, madame," I said:

She glanced through it, set her teeth, and
handed it back to me.

"You will sign it, madame, and fill in the
date of your second marriage and the name of
the church where it took place."

She made no reply, but rose and approached
the desk.

"We shall require another witness to your
signature, madame."

She paused and knit her brow. Then,—

"I will ring for my maid," she replied.

The rest of the business was quickly de-
spatched, and within half an hour I was back
again in my own room, having promised
Madame Caprices that before night she should
receive from my master his acknowledgment as
a guarantee of good faith.

When, at half-after ten, I knocked at Mr.

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Jaffrey's door and entered his room, I found that my summons had waked him from a sound sleep that, as I anticipated, had been the result of the severe strain upon his overtaxed nerves.

"What the devil did you—er wake me for, Hanby?" he began, in his usual languid drawl. Then, as memory evidently reasserted itself, he heaved a deep sigh, and added, in a different tone, "I wish to God I could have slept on forever."

I approached the bed, and held out the sheet of paper to him.

"Beg pardon for disturbing you, sir: I couldn't tell whether or not you were asleep, and so I ventured to bring you an eye-opener."

He ran through the brief contents of the paper, and his arm fell, as if paralyzed, upon the bed.

"How did you come by this, Hanby?" he asked, staring at me as if I were a sort of magician. "What does it mean?"

"It means, sir," I answered, "that you are a free man and have nothing more to fear from that lady. She will notify the police that she has recovered her jewels, and will permit them and the world to believe that they were never really stolen from her, but were pawned in order that she might raise a temporary loan. She has had men shadowing you, sir, since yesterday morning, but they are to be led to

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believe that her motive in securing their services was purely that of jealousy. Your attentions to her, sir, are common property, you know, and the reason will seem a natural one to her spies." And then, seeing that I must more fully explain matters to him in order that he should thoroughly comprehend his position in the affair as it now stood, I quickly sketched to him what I have already related to the reader.

When I finished, he said nothing for a few moments, but sat staring fixedly at the white linen sheet; after which he raised the paper and read it through again slowly, letting it flutter unheeded from his fingers to the bed when his inspection of it was concluded. Then he placed his hands over his face and eyes, as if he were seeking, by manual pressure, to force in upon his brain the realization that the horrible agony he had been enduring was over; that cold iron and steel were no longer his best friends; that he could again go out into the world and mingle among men, unsuspected and unaccused by them. After a little he dropped his hands and motioned me toward the window.

"Raise the blinds, Hanby," he said, in a hoarse, choked voice.

I obeyed, and a flood of sunshine poured into the room, making me blink by its bright-

ness. Mr. Jaffrey sprang from his bed and strode directly into it, his whole person bathed in its golden rays. With head upraised and eager eyes fixed on the bright patch of blue sky that smiled down upon him he stood, his arms slightly outstretched after the fashion of one who welcomes a friend whom he has thought never to see again.

"Sunshine, real sunshine again!" he cried aloud, exultantly. "And I can look it in the face! God! how I dreaded the day! How I dreaded it!"

He wheeled suddenly around and caught me by the shoulders.

"And it is to you, you little devil of a conjurer, that I owe it all!" he exclaimed, shaking me to and fro like a child, in his excitement. "Hanby, the luckiest day in my life, little as I thought it then, was the day I was drawn on that cursed jury-list."

That practically ended the affair. Mr. Jaffrey was naturally no more demonstrative than I, and he did not go into any extravagant expressions of gratitude to me, for which I was thankful, as I should have felt like a fool if he had. But I knew, when his hands fell on my shoulders and he looked into my eyes, just what his feelings were, and I must say that from that moment any lingering particle of regret I might have felt for my lost pecuniary advantages went

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out of mind forever. I felt fully repaid for my sacrifices.

One privilege, however, I did allow myself on the strength of the service I had done my master, and that was to beg him to be more guarded in future in his methods. This he readily promised, quoting, "'A burnt cat dreads the fire,' you know, Hanby;" but he was reckless and a dare-devil by nature, and I was in constant dread of his bringing himself again under suspicion, when I should probably find myself less well armed for his defence.

A few days after this I was one morning serving my master's breakfast when the door-bell rang. I answered it, and admitted Carolus Despard, the artist.

"I'm in a devil of a fix, Courty," he said, as Mr. Jaffrey called to him to come into the dining-room. "No, I've breakfasted, thanks. Thought perhaps you could help me out." He spoke half inquiringly, and, as my master nodded, he went on, "You know to-night I'm having that shindy in my studio—you got a card?—and this morning my man came to me with pleasant information to the effect that some confounded relative or other, his wife, I guess—no, it was one of his children, or an aunt—at any rate, something to do with him, had died, or was sick, or something of that sort. At

all events, he wanted the day and night off. I tell you, Jaffrey, it's a confounded shame that servants are allowed to—oh, ahem——!"

I caught the significant lifting of my master's eyebrows in my direction, although he did not think I did. Other men might regard their servants as automaton, as beings without the ordinary organs of feeling; not he.

"Well, the fact of the case is this. The fellow is too valuable to me for me to be able to threaten him with dismissal if he doesn't give up his tomfoolery and attend to his business. He is obstinate as a mule, and I've got to let him have his way. Now, of course I could get in a man from outside for the night, but, you see, the stuff in my studio is too valuable to be trusted to the discretion of some devil I don't know anything about. Now, I thought—er——" he seemed to become somewhat embarrassed, and perhaps, by some glance or gesture which I did not catch, he conveyed to my master a suggestion that my presence in the room somewhat impeded the freedom of his utterance, for suddenly Mr. Jaffrey interrupted him to say,—

"Er—excuse me a moment, Despard. Er—Hanby, just go down, will you, and—er ask the janitor what the devil's the matter with the steam this—er morning. It's as cold as—er—as charity in these rooms."

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By the time I returned, the two gentlemen had passed into the smoking-room. Hearing me re-enter, Mr. Jaffrey called me thither.

“Er-Hanby,” he said, “Mr. Despard does you the honor of—er requesting your services at his—er—his studio to-night.”

I bowed respectfully, and Mr. Despard broke in :

“You shall be well paid, Hanby ; I’ll see to that. I’m awfully anxious, you see, to have the thing go off well, for I’ve got a reputation for functions a little out of the common, and there are some people coming to me to-night that I’m unusually particular about. This damned nonsense of my—ahem ! I know what a clever chap you are, and should feel perfectly safe in placing the whole affair in your hands. I shall be really awfully obliged to you if you’ll come.” He regarded me anxiously.

“Mr. Despard pays your honesty a—er high compliment, Hanby,” my master interposed, gravely. “It isn’t every man that he would—er trust in his rooms.”

“No, that’s so, Hanby. There are a good many things scattered about there to tempt a dishonest person ; but any one employed and trusted by Mr. Jaffrey is sufficiently vouched for.”

I bowed again. Nothing but professional

propriety kept me from winking in response to the twinkle in my master's eye.

"Very good, sir," I replied.

A look of relief scattered the shadow from Mr. Despard's face.

"Then you will come!" he exclaimed. "There's a good fellow!" And he went off into an explanation of the duties he wished me to undertake, a repetition of which here would be quite unnecessary and would add nothing to the interest of this story.

It took fully a half-hour for him to explain the arrangements he had made for his guests' entertainment, and when he was finally persuaded that I thoroughly comprehended them and had made me promise to present myself at his studio at an early hour in the afternoon, he took his leave, accompanied by my master.

I then busied myself in clearing the breakfast-table and in getting everything ready for my master's evening toilet, for he would be obliged to dress himself that afternoon without my assistance. At one o'clock I had the rooms quite in order, and had laid out all that Mr. Jaffrey would require ready to his hand. I was just thinking about getting myself a snatch of luncheon before setting out for Mr. Despard's studio, when the door-bell rang.

A woman was standing without, whom I at once recognized as the servant belonging to

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the flat in Seventy-First Street. She wore an anxious and disturbed look, and spoke immediately the door opened :

“Is Mr. Jaffrey in?”

“No.”

“Not in !” she exclaimed, in surprised dismay. “I thought he never went out so early?”

“He does not, generally. This morning he had a visitor, and went out with him when he left.”

“Dear, dear !” she said. “What ever shall I do now ! Miss Jermyn made sure of his being here. You don’t happen to know where he is gone, I suppose?”

“Most probably to his club, I should think,” I replied.

“Ts, ts !” she returned, shaking her head. “I can’t go there after him.” Then a sudden brilliant thought seemed to strike her. “P’r’aps you’d go ; do, there’s a good soul,” she entreated.

“I might, certainly,” I returned, “if the occasion were important enough.”

“Important !” she cried. “Well, I guess it is.”

“Out with it, then,” I said ; “and make haste : I’m in a hurry.”

“And so’m I,” she rejoined. “I’ve got to fetch back a doctor with me.”

“A doctor ! Is Miss Jermyn ill?”

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“Miss Jermyn!” she repeated, contemptuously. “No; worse than that: it’s Mrs. Jaffrey.”

“Mrs. Jaffrey!” I almost fell back against the door in my surprise. My master was married! Down fell the hope I had secretly formed that he would catch some rich girl and so rid himself of the necessity of running such risks as those which now gained him a livelihood.

Apparently the woman’s patience was coming to an end. “Yes, yes, Mrs. Jaffrey herself, man. Just tell your master that she has had a sudden attack, a bad one,—he’ll know what that means,—and Miss Jermyn wants he should come up right away.”

She turned quickly and whisked off. I tried to make a grab at her skirts, but she was down the stairs in a jiffy, and I had nothing to do for it but to go back, get my hat and coat, and start for the Union Club, where at that hour I was pretty sure to find my master; and the only way I could relieve my disturbed feelings was by muttering over and over again to myself,—

“Married! Married! Married! What a cursed piece of business! What devil’s luck! What short-sighted folly!”

Mr. Jaffrey looked a bit nervous when he came out into the hall to see what was wanted of him.

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"Anything wrong, Hanby?" he asked, anxiously, in a low tone, for it was natural that he should associate me with bugaboos.

"I am afraid so, sir," I replied, watching him narrowly. "A messenger has come from Miss Jermyn to say that Mrs. Jaffrey is very ill,—has one of her attacks, the woman bade me tell you."

My master went white to the very lips.

"God!" he muttered to himself; "and they said the next one might be fatal!" Then, pulling himself sharply together, "Get me a cab, quick, Hanby."

He turned away to fetch his hat and top-coat, and soon joined me on the sidewalk, where I was holding open the door of the cab I had called for him.

As he entered it, after giving the driver the Seventy-First Street address, he said to me,—

"Make my excuses to Mr. Despard, Hanby. Tell him important business will probably prevent my coming to him to-night."

I touched my hat, and the cab rolled away. I should have felt little appetite for luncheon if it had not been for that sinister ejaculation which I had overheard my master mutter to himself: "They said the next one might be fatal!" It was a sort of verbal stimulant that braced me up immensely.



CHAPTER V

IT would be absurd for me to describe Mr. Despard's studio. It is of world-wide celebrity, and whenever the papers run short of society copy they write up a fresh description of that famous apartment. It is considered that the visits of distinguished strangers to New York are quite incomplete unless they have included a function held in Despard's studio. No novelty, be it skirt-dancer, juggler, hypnotist, or music-hall artiste, is thought to be fully endorsed until he or she has been asked to entertain a few choice spirits against this wonderful background ; and, as people are very sure that nothing but exceptional talent is ever engaged by Carolus Despard, it rarely happens that his invitations are declined.

He looked surprised and bored when I delivered my master's message to him.

"Pshaw!" he growled ; "I particularly wanted Mr. Jaffrey to-night. Is there any way of my getting a message to him, do you think, Hanby?"

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I reflected a moment.

"If it is really very important, sir, I think I could manage it."

"It is," he replied. "Do, there's a good fellow."

He had already whipped out his note-book and was scribbling a few lines in it in lead-pencil. Tearing out the sheet, he folded it into a cocked hat and gave it to me.

"There, get that to him if you can; and come back at once, for I want to show you about everything. Look sharp now, won't you, Hanby?"

I reassured him upon this point, and hurried off. Once outside the door I mastered the contents of the little note:

"DEAR JAFFREY,—

"Do come. I've gone to no end of trouble to capture Elinor Burnham, simply that you may meet her. You know 'there's millions in it,' and you might as well have them as any other man.

"Yours, C. D."

I smiled grimly to myself. What a bait to lure a man from the death-bed of his wife! Knowing what I did, it seemed rather a cold-blooded business even to deliver the note to my master, for, although his marriage was a

terrible misfortune in my sight, I was pretty sure that he did not share my sentiments regarding it, and that his whole heart was centred in that unpretentious little flat whither I was bound.

The elevated railway soon brought me to my destination, and the same woman who had presented herself a few hours before at Mr. Jaffrey's door answered my soft knock. I did not dare ring.

"How is Mrs. Jaffrey?" I asked.

She shook her head dismally.

"Very bad," she said.

"I have a note for my master: can I see him?"

"Better give it to me: he won't leave her for a minute."

But this I did not intend to do. The note was unsealed, and I thought it best not to send it through other hands.

"Go and ask him to step here a moment. Tell him I won't detain him longer," I insisted.

She departed, leaving me standing on the threshold, and in another moment my master appeared, looking desperately wan and troubled.

"What is it, Hanby?" he asked, impatiently.

"A note, sir, from Mr. Despard."

He glanced quickly through it.

"D—tion!" he cried, tearing it into a thou-

sand bits. "Confound Miss Burnham and everybody else! Go back, Hanby, and tell Mr. Despard that if he brought down an angel from Paradise robed in white, I wouldn't even so much as look at her. Tell him that there is a woman here whose life is hanging by a thread, for whom I care more than for all the other women in the world combined. No, stay," he added, the excitement of overwrought feeling dying out of his face as he passed his hand wearily over his brow: "I'm talking wild. Just say to Mr. Despard, will you, Hanby, that it will be absolutely impossible for me to be with him this evening. You need give no reason, you understand. Just make my regrets in proper form."

I bowed, and he made a gesture of dismissal. I returned immediately and delivered his message to Mr. Despard, who fretted a good hour over the miscarriage of his plans.

The attraction which Mr. Despard was offering his friends that night took the form of a very renowned and wonderful medium, whose remarkable powers had gained the attention of distinguished scientists in two worlds. It was a matter of great difficulty to secure her services even by payment of a sum considered extortionate and outrageous by many persons, but which she had no difficulty in securing whenever she was willing and able to employ

her peculiar gift ; for the testimonials as to her extraordinary abilities, conferred by men of the highest standing, had caused her to be greatly sought after by the curious and those interested in psychical research.

Mrs. Deane was a woman of good birth, respectable position, and fair education. She was modest and retiring in her public capacity, and averse to exhibiting her powers in a general way. It had only been through the intervention of an intimate friend, who was a prominent member of the American Psychical Society, that Mr. Despard had been able to induce her to appear for his friends.

These facts concerning her I gained from scraps of conversation overheard during the evening. A little before ten the guests began to arrive.

The first persons I admitted were Mrs. Munyon Pyle and the Duchess of Clayborough. Both ladies recognized me at once, and, as they had never placed any faith in the accusation brought against me by the officer, but, on the contrary, had expressed themselves as valuing highly my exertions in their behalf upon the occasion of the accident, they were pleased to bestow a very kindly, though somewhat surprised, greeting upon me.

"You here, Hanby !" her grace remarked.
"Not left Mr. Jaffrey, I hope?"

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Mr. Despard explained the situation, and the ladies smiled comprehendingly.

“What ! the first upon the scene !” exclaimed Mrs. Pyle, as, disencumbered of their wraps, the ladies passed into the studio. “The blame of our early arrival be upon your own head, Mr. Despard ; you begged it, remember.”

“And I am grateful for it. Mrs. Deane cannot be prevailed upon to give us more than half an hour, and absolutely refuses to allow fresh admissions during the séance. She is an autocrat, you know, and those who are not here at ten must be content to sit without the gate. Ah, Mrs. Leyland, so good of you to come ; and you, Miss Burnham ! But I am disappointed, for I promised to show you our dude *par excellence*, and, do you know, the wretch has failed me.”

The two ladies whom he was welcoming were, I learned later, aunt and niece, lately returned from Germany, where the education of the latter had been undergoing a finishing process. Her return to New York had been somewhat eagerly anticipated, for, being an only child and an orphan, all the Burnham millions had passed into her possession upon the completion of her twenty-first year.

And yet, to look at her, no one would for a moment have accredited her with the command of such wealth. Of all the women who

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assembled in Mr. Despard's studio that night she was the simplest in attire, manner, and bearing. But for the attention paid her by the women, and the deference by the men, I might have believed that I had made a mistake in supposing her to be the Miss Burnham of whom I had heard and read so much.

She was a tall, beautifully formed girl, with a small head and gracious, unaffected carriage. Her dark hair was divided by a long straight part that made a white line from her low brow back to where the waving hair was gathered into a knot upon the crown of the head. Her eyes were very dark blue, and her skin was fresh and fair. She wore a gown of some white material that looked very simple and inexpensive, though I dare say it cost enough, and was without a jewel of any sort.

I don't know that she was considered beautiful in any degree,—I had never seen a description of her personal charms in the papers which eulogized her monetary attractions,—but I think there would have been no difficulty in her winning almost any man she cared to, even if she had been totally without fortune. There was a singular charm and loveliness about her which even extended to me, a mere flunky, as I opened the door. Someway, the little smile that lay about the corners of her sweet mouth and in her blue eyes, as her glance rested for

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an instant upon me, quite warmed the cockles of my heart.

Mr. Despard's guests were unanimous in obedience to his request that ten o'clock should see them all assembled. On the stroke of the hour I opened the door to admit the strangely gifted woman whose occult powers were to furnish the evening's entertainment.

Mr. Despard received her with marked courtesy, and at once conducted her into the magnificent studio which was to be the scene of her performance. There were perhaps eighteen persons gathered there, and even the most *blasé* face among them showed a gleam of real interest and expectation as this purveyor of a fresh sensation entered the room.

She was a woman some inches above medium height, with what is called a good figure, rather broad shoulders, and a small waist. Her face was almost beautiful, the features regular though rather largely moulded, the complexion very pure and colorless, the forehead high and somewhat shaded by a slightly waved bang of thick blond hair, the rest of which was drawn back with no regard to fashion and wound around her head loosely.

Except for the eyes, there was nothing in the least remarkable about her. These were of a light hazel, and had a curious, distant, far-away look in them that gave rather an unusual

expression to her face. Her manner was free from pretension, and was self-possessed, simple, and dignified ; she responded to Mr. Despard's slight general introduction calmly and easily.

"I would like less light, if you please," she replied, in answer to his question as to what difference she would suggest in the arrangement of the room. "Then, if the ladies and gentlemen will come a little closer together,—not to form a circle ; no, I do not require any joining of finger-tips, or anything of that sort," with a little amused smile, as a general move suggestive of such an idea was being made ; "only to come rather more within the compass of my voice. That is very nice indeed, thank you. You have insured me against interruption, sir ?"

Mr. Despard replied in the affirmative, and, to reassure her, repeated to me, in her hearing, his injunction against any one being allowed to enter the studio until the sitting should be concluded.

I had, according to his order, lowered the lamps until a light prevailed sufficient for the identification of the various faces, but not by any means brilliant. The guests sat grouped together at one end of the apartment, and in their midst the medium took her seat.

"You need not be frightened, ladies and

gentlemen," she said, in a clear, matter-of-fact tone, "at any physical contortions I may indulge in while going into the trance-state, or in coming out from it. They tell me I do very queer things, but, as I am quite unconscious of them, they do not trouble me, nor need they alarm you. If, when I am in the trance, the old doctor who controls me addresses any of you, be so good as to reply to him, for"—she smiled again—"I am told he did not leave a very quick temper behind him when he went out. It would help me if one of you would allow me to hold your hands." She glanced quickly over the group, and her eyes lighted upon Miss Burnham, who was placed near her. "Would you be willing?" she asked, addressing her. "You will not mind if I twist them a little? I shall not really hurt you."

The girl responded with an inclination of her head, and her chair was moved a little nearer Mrs. Deane's.

All the doors leading into the studio had been closed, but, as the only means of shutting off the dining-room was by portières, these had been simply drawn together, and by stationing myself at their juncture it was easy for me to see and hear what was going on.

The stillness of the studio was absolute. I am sure the little group of men and women must have been able to count each other's

heart-beats. The medium sat in a chair of carved teak-wood, her body bent a little forward, her elbows resting on her knees, and both hands closed over the slender palms of the girl who sat in a low seat directly facing her. There was a breathless look of expectation on every face.

A moment or two the medium breathed evenly and regularly, like a person going to sleep ; then the breaths grew more labored and seemed to come from the deepest recesses of the lungs, being accompanied by little groans and cries, half-articulated phrases, and incipient indications of alarm which never developed into actual screams, but seemed to hint at fear, terror, and suffering. The face grew convulsed, the muscles twitched, the strong white teeth—which I had remarked as being quite a feature of her face—snapped violently together and were ground and gritted so harshly that it seemed as if their enamel covering must yield to such compression.

The broad shoulders of the woman worked back and forth, the bust rose and fell beneath the stertorous breathing, the arms were raised before the face with the gesture of one seeking to ward off an attack, while the hands which grasped Miss Burnham's slim fingers turned and twisted their unresisting prisoners, tightened and loosened their pressure upon them,

and seemed to be putting them to such violent usage that Mr. Merton Harley, whom I afterward discovered to be very considerably interested in the heiress, ventured to expostulate with Miss Burnham in a low tone for allowing the medium to retain possession of them.

I could not hear what he said, but I could see the girl negative his remonstrance with a decided shake of her dark head. It was apparent that, having consented to face an ordeal, she would not readily withdraw from it.

Suddenly, when the strain of excited feeling was growing so great among all who watched the convulsed figure that even I forgot myself to the extent of thrusting my head through the portières in order to gain a better view of the strange performance, all muscular contortion ceased. Abruptly, there fell upon that alarming and extraordinary state of agitation a wonderful and all-pervading calm, that was so great a contrast to the condition which had just been harrowing our nerves to their utmost limit that involuntarily a sigh of relief escaped from every breast.

The face grew placid and smooth ; scarcely a breath seemed to mar the repose of the quiet bosom ; the arms, hitherto held on a level with the eyes, were permitted to drop again into the lap ; while the hands, relaxing their grip of

those which lay within their clasp, now simply held the latter in a gentle pressure.

I quickly withdrew my head, fearing detection, but at the sound of a strange voice within the studio I could not forbear again peeping in to see who the speaker might be. To my amazement, the lips which were in motion were those of Mrs. Deane, but the voice—that was no more like the soft womanish voice of the medium than a bass-viol is like a violin. It was the voice of a man, deep, rather gruff, and masculine in every tone and accent.

“How do you do, eh?” he began (for while the woman was in that curious condition which she called the trance-state it was simply impossible to apply feminine pronouns to her: one never thought of the personality which conducted the conversation as other than masculine).

He addressed several members of the group by name, using a curious idiom which was half French and half English, suggested to them that friends who had died were standing near wishing to communicate with them, and, in response to requests for messages from these departed ones, delivered a number which were pronounced by the recipients to be most extraordinary tests of a supernatural agency.

It is not my purpose to go into a detailed account of a séance which, remarkable as it

seemed to the novices assembled that evening in Mr. Despard's studio, has doubtless been matched in marvels many times within the experience of those who read this story. Only those portions bearing upon my narrative will I relate, and those briefly.

After Mrs. Deane had satisfied the importunities of the most forward and self-assertive of her audience there was a moment's interval which no one claimed. Of this the presumed spirit, which professed to be that of a deceased French physician, Dr. Jaret by name, himself took advantage.

He suddenly addressed the girl whose hands still lay within Mrs. Deane's clasp, and who had, as yet, uttered no word, but had sat wonderingly gazing into the face before her,—a face from which the hair had been nervously pushed back by one of the medium's hands, and which, strange as it may seem, appeared to have changed its soft, feminine contours and to have grown strong, forceful, manly.

"You have had a beautiful life, my dear," he said, modulating his voice almost caressingly as he saluted her.

Miss Burnham did not reply, but still continued to gaze with awe-struck eyes upon the closed lids of the face she confronted.

"I mean," the voice continued, "a beautiful spiritual life, *vous comprenez, une belle vie*

de l'âme. Ah! *vraiment*, it is a lovely, a truly pure soul, this." And the hand that held hers patted it tenderly. There was a moment's pause, of which Mrs. Munyon Pyle endeavored to take advantage, but was restrained by Mr. Harley.

"Let him finish with Miss Burnham," I heard him whisper.

Just then there came to my ears the sound of footsteps mounting the staircase leading to the apartment. Thinking that the noise of the bell might penetrate to the studio and disturb the séance, I hastened to forestall its ringing, and, on throwing open the door, was amazed to see my master standing before me.

"Ah—er, Hanby, I got here, after all," he began.

I laid my finger on my lips.

"They are at it, sir," I said, warningly. "And any noise was to be prevented, Mr. Despard said."

"At it? At what, er—Hanby? Ah—er, yes, I remember; *spooks*. Well, how are they getting on?"

"It's really quite wonderful, sir," I replied, divesting him of his top-coat. Then, "How is Mrs. Jaffrey, sir, if I may make bold to ask?"

"Better, better, Hanby; herself again, thank God!" he answered, cheerfully, and

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was about to pass on and into the studio, but I intercepted him. "What! no admittance, Hanby?"

"That was Mr. Despard's order, sir; according to the medium's wish."

"Ah—er, well, that's all right. Anywhere I can smoke a cigarette while I—er am waiting?"

Instead of replying to his question, I told him of the loop-hole through which he could watch the curious proceedings going on within the studio, and gave such a glowing account of them that I aroused his curiosity to witness them for himself. I placed him at my former post, and stationed myself between the door-casing and the edge of the portière.

It seemed that the old doctor had during my absence finished whatever he had to say to Miss Burnham, for on my return I found that Mrs. Munyon Pyle had succeeded in making herself heard, and it was she who now had the floor.

"I was going to ask, Dr. Jaret," she was saying, "if you have any power of discovering the whereabouts of stolen or lost goods."

The medium's forehead contracted into a frown.

"It is, what you call, frivolous, such work," he objected.

"Yes, I know, but," Mrs. Pyle continued, persistently, "you see I feel so awfully

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responsible, don't you know? The duchess here——" The doctor interrupted her.

"*Si, si*, I know," he said, and held out one hand to her grace, retaining his grasp upon Miss Burnham's with the other. "Your hand, madame, *s'il vous plaît*. Ah! so!" He took the jewelled hand extended to him by the Duchess of Clayborough, and placed it firmly against the medium's brow.

"Hm! hm!" he muttered to himself, his head bent as if in deep abstraction. Suddenly he raised Miss Burnham's hand and pressed it also to his brow.

There was perfect silence in the room; anticipation was in every glance. After a moment or two, this singular personality withdrew the two hands from Mrs. Deane's forehead, and with very real perplexity in his voice said, slowly,—

"It is *vèrry*—curious. I see a connection here, *mais* a connection of the past *et du futur*. I see through your beautiful hand, madame, *une rivière* of glittering stones, *des bijoux*, *vous comprenez, très recherchés et de prix*. Also I see through these little fingers, *mademoiselle*, *une rivière* of glittering drops, *mais, hélas! une rivière de larmes*, of tears, you understand, *mademoiselle*. And"—he frowned heavily, almost angrily—"between *ces rivières* there stands a man, I see him very plain, *un homme*

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très comme il faut, blond, grand, de bonne mine,—not a man that you call a common thief, but a man *très distingué*, you understand? He is"—he paused a moment—"he is here now,—right here in this apartment. I see him."

And so did I. I was looking directly at him, and saw him start at the old man's words.

The little audience cast looks of consternation and surprise at each other. There was only one man among them who answered to the medium's description : this was Mr. Merton Harley. They could not see and had no knowledge of the figure at which I was gazing, the figure of my master standing half within, half without the room, between the folds of the portières.

It was not strange that, being the only man present who could possibly be identified with the medium's words, Mr. Harley somewhat resented them. He grew quite red and confused, and, as the voice ceased speaking, burst out rather hotly,—

"By Jove, monsieur, this is a little rough on me, I think ! It may seem somewhat conceited for me to apply the whole of your complimentary description to myself, but I happen to be the only tall, fair man in the room, you see, and a fellow rather dislikes hearing himself identified as a thief and the destroyer of Miss Burnham's peace of mind."

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He gave a short, embarrassed laugh as he concluded ; apparently he was rather ashamed to let his companions think the words of a charlatan had power to move him.

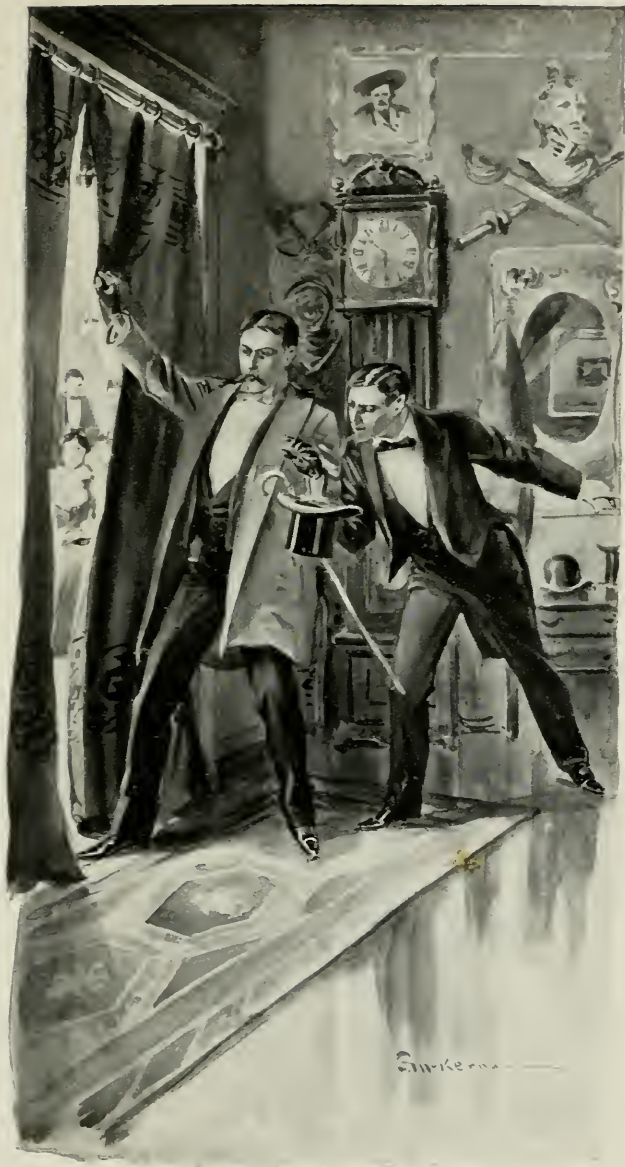
Before the medium could reply, Mrs. Munyon Pyle and the duchess, each believing the question she desired to put the most important to the subject in hand, chimed in together. At the same moment an old Delft clock in the corner of the room struck the half-hour.

The doctor's voice at once interrupted the clamor. "The séance is over, *mesdames et messieurs*," he said. "My medium is not strong ; *il faut partir. Je vous salue*,—I wish you *adieu*,—*et vous, mademoiselle, je suis très* ——" the articulation was unintelligible, the voice grew weak and faint.

I hurriedly approached my master.

"Quick, sir," I said ; "you must get out of this ; you must, indeed. It would never do for you to be seen here, after that. Remember, it was in your apartment that the duchess last saw her diamonds ; you fully correspond to the old man's description ; you have confessed to several gentlemen that you know who stole Madame Caprices' jewels—indeed, they have seen one of them in your possession. Quick, sir, do go," I implored.

He seemed very absent, his glance apparently riveted on the face of the girl whose



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"Quick, sir," I said; "you must get out of this; you must, indeed."

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hands were again undergoing supernatural assault. But at last, presumably recognizing the force of my suggestions, he slowly turned about and allowed me to help him on with his top-coat. I softly closed the door upon him, peeped again into the studio where the medium was repeating her contortions, and then departed to oversee the setting forth of the exquisite supper which Mr. Despard had ordered for the refreshment of his guests. A great deal of chatter and comment formed the accompaniment of the choice banquet. The medium, declining any refreshment, had at once withdrawn after struggling out of the trance-state, and her audience were therefore at liberty to indulge in speculation and criticism unrestrained by her presence. Even the most sceptical among them were impressed by her undoubtedly marvellous powers, and only one, Mr. Harley, showed a disposition to discredit her genuineness.

It was evident, however, that he was quite upset by the medium's statement concerning the identity and presence in the studio of the man who was responsible for the duchess's loss, and who was to unloose the fountain of Miss Burnham's tears. He showed so much annoyance and perturbation, was so severe in his denunciations of mediums in general and of Mrs. Deane in particular, that he drew the

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attention of the whole party to himself, and caused this little incident of the séance, which without his assistance would doubtless have been passed over as a ridiculous mistake in an otherwise remarkable performance, to be quite largely considered and discussed. Indeed, so persistently did he harp upon the subject that at last Mr. Key, who was one of the guests, burst forth,—

“Great heavens, Harley, don't take this ridiculous business so much to heart, man. Do you think we are going to take you—for—a—thief?”

The beginning of the ejaculation had all the rush and impetus of a rocket soaring into the air; its ending much resembled the fall of the stick, so flat, dull, and uneloquent was it. Indeed, his tongue fairly halted over the last word, and he grew quite embarrassed.

Probably nobody noticed his confusion save myself and another man; this other man was Mr. Bettall, and I saw, by the quick glance that he first cast upon Mr. Harley and then transferred to Mr. Key, the surprised, almost bewildered look of one who has suddenly received a suggestion which almost staggers belief, that the same idea had occurred to him that I felt had nearly paralyzed Mr. Key's tongue.

The remark so innocently begun, and which,

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like Aaron's rod, had turned to a serpent to sting and torture the speaker's mind with doubts and suspicions, was the signal for a general guying of Mr. Harley. One by one the men and women, with the exception of Mr. Key and Mr. Bettall, who applied themselves to their terrapin silently and with downcast eyes, joined in chaffing him regarding the insinuations of the medium.

"Why—why—why," Mrs. Pyle began, "it is true that you were at Mr. Jaffrey's supper that night, Mr. Harley. And, come to think of it, you stood very close to the duchess going down in the lift."

"Yes, yes; and then there are Leila Caprices' jewels!" chimed in Mrs. Noble-Revere. "Perhaps, after all, she didn't—hm! What?—Oh, mustn't mention what everybody knows?" as Miss Burnham murmured some indistinguishable words to her. "Oh, you little Puritan maiden! Well, then I will say perhaps some of us have drawn false conclusions as to the fate of Leila's jewels, and we have their thief right here in our very midst. You know, Mr. Harley, with the exception of Courtice Jaffrey, no one has been more devoted to our giddy Señora than yourself! Ha, ha, ha!"

Her laugh was echoed and re-echoed by the amused circle, and accusatory facts, bits of incriminating testimony, and the like, were piled

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upon the head of the victim of their sport, until a mass of circumstantial evidence had accumulated against him which seemed sufficient to convict any criminal in the land.

As the matter thus assumed the character of a huge joke, Mr. Harley's annoyance perceptibly decreased. He even entered into the spirit of the thing, and himself suggested opportunities and possibilities strengthening the case against him, which the others had overlooked or had been ignorant of.

But I noticed that neither Mr. Key nor Mr. Bettall joined in the general merriment. I observed one significant, lightning-like glance pass between them, and, having been present when my master announced to them that a gentleman thief was at large among their number of intimates, it was easy enough for me to translate its meaning into words: "Is this the man for whom Jaffrey pleaded the other evening? What more natural than that he should undertake the defence of this his most familiar friend?"

It was one o'clock before the party broke up, and when, finally, the ladies took their departure, a few of the gentlemen remained behind for a final cigar and night-cap.

I had received permission from Mr. Despard to leave whenever I might wish to, after the ladies went. "Just see that those men of

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Sherry's are fairly gone, and then leave everything standing as it is, Hanby," he said. "My fellow will look out for it all in the morning."

He had slipped a generous bill into my hand as recompense for my services, and that, together with the amusement I had received from the séance and the relief afforded my mind by the discovery that suspicion was beginning to light upon Mr. Harley instead of my master, made me feel amply repaid for any extra labor I had been put to. I had an idea that Mr. Key and Mr. Bettall would feel a desire to have a little talk together as soon as possible, and it also occurred to me that they might agree to stroll along homeward together in order to discuss the suggestion which had evidently struck them both at the same moment. It seemed to me that it would not be at all a bad thing for me to make a third, a silent and unsuspected third, at the discussion, and so hear what they had to say about the matter.

On the chance of my theory being correct, I therefore, after leaving everything in a tolerable condition of sightliness in the dining-room, stationed myself in the shadow just outside the vestibule of the apartment-house in which the studio was located, and waited. My patience was not put to very severe strain, for soon after I had taken up my position I heard the bell

summoning the lift, then the noise of the ascent and descent of the latter, followed by the opening of the door and the approach of footsteps, the footsteps of two men.

I certainly was in luck that night, for as they emerged into the street I could tell by their voices that my conclusions were right and that these were the men I was watching for. As they came out I heard Mr. Bettall say,—

“By Jove ! it does not seem possible !”

To which Mr. Key replied, “You’re right, Billy ; it doesn’t.”

I let them get a couple of paces start of me and stole along noiselessly behind them, near enough to hear what they said, yet not close enough to attract their notice. Both were smoking, and for a minute or two they puffed away in silence at their cigars. Finally Mr. Bettall remarked,—

“Poor old Courty ! He must be devilish cut up about this. I always thought Harley more to his taste than the rest of us.”

“Yes, they were fairly intimate. He is cut up, of course ; remember how he defended him the other night ? Significant, isn’t it, that Harley was about the only one of our special set who wasn’t there at the time ?”

“Hm ! yes. Wonder it didn’t occur to any of us then.”

“Occur to us ! Good God ! why should it

occur to us? Who is going to suspect a man whom he has never dreamt of doubting, unless he has some grounds to go on?"

"That's so."

There was another pause; then Mr. Bettall said,—

"He's been pretty hard up at times, Harley. Owed me very near five hundred for a good bit."

"Paid it?"

"Yes."

"How long since?"

"Hm-m-m," reflectively; then suddenly, "By Jove! Two days after Jaffrey's supper-party! I remember when he gave me the check he said Jaffrey had just paid him the amount for a horse. I recollect that we had a discussion about the points of the horse later on."

Again a silence fell upon the two gentlemen. This time it was Mr. Key who broke it.

"Great heaven!" he exclaimed, "what an infernal idiot a man is to ruin himself like that! What would you do about it?"

"Well, I don't know. Harley has evidently had a great scare to-night. He looked fearfully cut up."

"I think we ought to speak to Jaffrey about it and let him know we have discovered his man. By Jove, I don't like associating with

such a scoundrel as that ! I think Jaffrey ought to make him get out of New York, anyway : don't you ?''

Mr. Bettall grunted assent, and all my bright visions suddenly clouded over. I knew that sooner than see another man, and that other man his particular friend, accused or even suspected of his own crimes, my master would come forward and confess everything. I must by all means prevent Mr. Jaffrey's learning of the suspicion which involved Mr. Harley. A plan flashed into my brain, and I at once started off to execute it.

I knew where Mr. Key's lodgings were situated, and, as he was going a considerable distance out of his way to accompany Mr. Bettall to his mother's residence, where he lived, in order to discuss their fancied discovery, I resolved to quit their society, head Mr. Key off, and meet him at his own door.

All this I carried into effect. As, about fifteen minutes after I had gained his domicile, I saw him approaching, I stepped forward and saluted him respectfully. There was an electric lamp directly before the house, and he recognized me at once.

"You, Hanby !" he exclaimed, in surprise.

"Yes, beg pardon, sir," I replied. "I took the liberty of waiting for you, sir, as I had something of importance to say to you."

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"Shall we go in?" he asked, with his hand in his pocket for his latch-key.

"If you don't mind standing for a minute, sir, I won't detain you long. It is very late, I know, to be troubling you; but the fact is, I noticed this evening that you and Mr. Bettall had discovered all."

Mr. Key actually started in his surprise.

"All? All what, Hanby?"

"About Mr. Harley, sir. And I was afraid you might go to Mr. Jaffrey, sir, about it. You will remember, perhaps, that I was in the room the other night when Mr. Jaffrey went on about Mr. Harley, defending him. I have the honor to be in my master's confidence more considerably than most servants, and I happened to find out about Mr. Harley. Not from him, sir; he would never have told me; but you will excuse my saying more."

Mr. Key nodded.

"Mr. Jaffrey has been terribly worked up about this business, sir. Indeed, I heard the doctor tell him that if he didn't give over worrying about what was troubling him he wouldn't answer for the consequences."

What good friends a quick imagination and an unscrupulous conscience are! I could see that Mr. Key was quite moved by my glib lies.

"And you are afraid if he finds out that we have discovered what a thorough-going rascal

Mr. Harley is, it will distress him : is that it, Hanby ?”

“Yes, sir. And it won't do any good, either, sir ; there is no real proof against Mr. Harley.”

Mr. Key looked doubtful. “I am not so sure of that,” he said.

“You are thinking of all that joking that was going on to-night, sir? Even if it were true, it's nothing but circumstantial evidence, which wouldn't serve at all to convict him. Besides, sir, my master is so sorry for him and likes him so well that, for the sake of serving him, I'm not sure he wouldn't swear him an alibi.”

A little gleam of suspicion came into Mr. Key's eyes.

“You seem to take a warm interest in preventing Mr. Harley's accusation, my man,” he said.

“Not for his sake, sir,” I replied. “As far as he is concerned, you might hang him as high as Haman, for all I care. But, Mr. Key, you can never know how much my master has done for me. I couldn't tell you, sir. But if I could lay down my life to spare him even the shadow of trouble, I would do it, and count it nothing as payment for what I owe him. And that is why I took the liberty of speaking to you to-night. The minute I saw you and Mr.

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Bettall exchange looks I said to myself, 'They know all,' and then I thought of my master : I felt pretty sure you'd go to him about it. And so I hurried off here, sir, to see if you wouldn't keep mum about the matter, both you and Mr. Bettall, as long as it can't do any good to accuse him. I'd like to spare my master any more fretting over this business if I could, sir, and that's a fact."

Mr. Key remained silent for a few minutes, gazing intently at the pavement, evidently thinking deeply. Presently he said,—

"Those ladies have been done out of small fortunes ; there is no reason why they should bear such a loss and Harley escape scot-free with the boodle."

My wit is quick. "Mr. Jaffrey has made him promise restitution, sir," I said. "The jewels are gone, but the money will soon be restored to them indirectly. Indeed, Señora Caprices has already received the equivalent of her loss."

After another pause, during which Mr. Key stood looking straight at me, he gave a short laugh.

"Well, you are a queer little beggar, Hanby," he said. "I wonder how many valets consider it part of their business to take charge of their masters' ease of mind as well as of body. I won't commit myself to any-

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thing to-night ; it's too serious a matter to be hastily decided ; but I'll talk it over with Mr. Bettall, and"—yawning heavily—"we'll see, we'll see."

He nodded a dismissal and passed into the house. I felt that I had won my point, however, and after-events proved me to be right.





CHAPTER VI

WHEN I reached home I found that my master had already retired, but in the morning, while I was dressing him, he asked me many questions about the evening's entertainment, and I easily discovered that it had not occurred to him that the words of the medium could for a moment bring Mr. Harley under real suspicion.

He pooh-poohed the idea of there being anything supernatural in the woman's powers, insisting that she had gotten her information in regard to the affair of the robbery from the newspapers in common with all the world, and that her accurate description of himself was a mere coincidence. Of course I was exceedingly careful that he should not dream of the discovery which Mr. Key and Mr. Bettall supposed themselves to have made, nor of the fact that I had done my best to confirm them in their mistake.

Mr. Jaffrey seemed less interested in the details of the séance than in my description of

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the guests, and even on this point his desire for information seemed narrowed down to one person. This person was the heiress, Miss Burnham, about whom he made many inquiries, even appearing to endeavor to draw me on to expressing my own humble admiration for that exceedingly wealthy young lady.

"She was quite the attraction, sir, of the whole party," I returned, "and I don't wonder at it. What with all her money and that sweet, pretty way she has with her, it isn't strange that she should have all the gentlemen at her feet. Mr. Harley seemed particularly struck, sir."

"Er—did he?" Mr. Jaffrey returned. "Well, I wish he may—er win her. He—er—he needs the money."

"It's a pity, sir," I made bold again to venture, pointedly, "that other gentlemen I know of couldn't make a fortune as safely and easily as that."

Mr. Jaffrey, who was filing his nails, looked up at me and laughed.

"Meaning—er me, Hanby?" he asked. "Well, I'm not—er exactly in a position to—er—to marry, you know."

I sighed and shook my head. What an outrageous shame it was, I thought, that Mr. Jaffrey should have so hampered his fortunes!

The days passed on, and the winter wore

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away without anything of especial note taking place. I heard nothing from Mr. Key or Mr. Bettall, and concluded that they had determined to leave the matter as it stood and not harry my master any further concerning it, unless some fresh indiscretion on Mr. Harley's part should force them to do so. As for Mr. Jaffrey, during the rest of that winter he took no more chances with fortune. Nor was it necessary for him to do so. The value of that magnificent necklace of her grace's, to say nothing of the revenue from the Caprices' jewels, would keep him afloat for a long time.

But, even had it been necessary for him to make fresh exertions, I do not know if he would have been equal to the occasion. It seemed to me that a change had come over him, the origin of which I could not trace, nor could I put my finger on the exact day when I first noticed it. It may be that it dated back to the night when I discovered him standing before his toilet-table face to face with Eternity, although I should rather say that I did not note any difference in him until after that séance in Mr. Despard's studio.

At any rate, he did not appear to be in his usual form, and, whereas he had been wont to accept as many invitations as he could possibly crowd into the day and night, now he not unfrequently dined quietly at home and spent

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a long, solitary evening before his own hearth. I wondered that on such occasions he did not prefer to pass his leisure up in Seventy-First Street rather than by himself."

Once in a while I was charged with some note or message to Miss Jermyn or Mrs. Jaffrey, but I never caught sight of the latter, though I was most curious to see what she was like and took advantage of every chance which might procure me the desired opportunity. The occasional notes which passed between Mr. and Mrs. Jaffrey were always most affectionate and loving, and testified a warm mutual devotion.

One afternoon, somewhere along in February, Mr. Jaffrey brought Mr. Harley home with him.

"Lay two covers, Hanby," he said, "and—er go round and tell them to send in something—er rather better than common for—er dinner."

There was nothing to complain of in the delicate little dinner which, an hour later, I served to the two gentlemen; but such was Mr. Harley's humor that not even the deliciously prepared viands nor the excellent wines were potent to dispel a shadow which evidently clouded his spirits.

After they had left the table and were comfortably ensconced before a wood fire in the smoking-room with plenty of cigars and a

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liqueur-stand within reach, I heard my master begin, affectionately,—

“I—er say, Harley, what's up, old man? You don't seem quite—er fit, you know.”

My heart jumped into my mouth, and I snuggled myself into those ever-faithful friends of the inquisitive, the portières.

“What,” thought I, “if the fat's in the fire, and my dupes have at last shown too plainly to Mr. Harley that they know something to his discredit!”

With beating pulses I listened for the latter's reply. He took the weed out of his mouth and blew a cloud of smoke into the room before he answered. Then, with his eyes bent upon the moist end of the cigar, he said,—

“Well, Courty, there is something wrong with me, and that's a fact; but I'll be d—d if I can exactly explain it to you. Fact is, there's been for some time a growing coolness toward me on the part of the fellows at the clubs. I can't say when it began, and God knows I haven't any idea what has caused it, but it is painfully evident all the same.”

Mr. Jaffrey smiled incredulously.

“Oh—er, hang it all, Harley, you're too sensitive; that's what's the matter.”

The other shook his head emphatically.

“No such thing,” he said. “A man would be thunderingly tough-skinned not to notice

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slights which have been put upon me of late. Why, good heavens, Jaffrey ! the other night I went into the Union Club card-room and offered to take a hand at poker with some fellows—let me see, there were Bettall, Bellew, Don Key, and Horton Stokes there. They were civil and dealt me a hand, but before we had played fifteen minutes every man but Stokes had made some excuse to drop out, although, as Stokes said, when they began to play they had intimated that they meant to make a night of it."

Mr. Jaffrey began to look grave.

"Why, Harley," he said, "they—er must have had some—er—some other reason for leaving, old man. You don't think it was because they—er didn't want to play with you?"

"That is exactly what I do think, then," the other returned, with considerable feeling.

"Absurd !" Mr. Jaffrey cried. "Why, my dear fellow, what—er reason under heaven could they have had for—er treating you like—er that?"

Mr. Harley rose from his chair, plunged his hands into his pockets, and stood leaning against the chimney-piece, looking excitedly down at my master. Tall, slight, and fair, he bore rather a close resemblance to Mr. Jaffrey ; indeed, they were much more alike than are most brothers.

"That's what I want you to tell me, Courtice," he replied. "This isn't the first time

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they have turned the cold shoulder on me, those fellows, and, egad, before long the rest of the world may catch the contagion of their example."

I winced, but Mr. Jaffrey remained calm, incredulous, unmoved. He was possessed of the unconsciousness of utter ignorance ; while I, being so largely in the secret of this movement against Mr. Harley, quaked guiltily.

Mr. Jaffrey made no immediate reply, but sat smoking away thoughtfully, gazing into the fire as if he might discover a solution of the mystery in its glowing depths. Presently he said, slowly,—

"Could it be jealousy, do you think, Harley, of—er Miss Burnham's evident preference for you? They are all three in the—er running for the Burnham stakes, I—er believe."

Mr. Harley flushed and shook his head.

"No ; no fool could be jealous of such a preference as Miss Burnham shows me : it's too confoundedly open and friendly."

Mr. Jaffrey looked up at his friend in surprise.

"Why, by Jove, old man ! you've got an attack of midsummer madness out of—er season. There isn't a man in town who wouldn't give odds on your chances."

The flush on Mr. Harley's fair face deepened.

"D—n it all, Courty," he said, "such a

matter as that is no subject for a wager." He spoke with much feeling. Mr. Jaffrey regarded him questioningly.

"Gone—er deep, Harley? Deeper than the glitter of mere—er metallic surface attractions?"

The other nodded. "Wish to heaven she hadn't a nickel!" he muttered.

"And—er yet, such a fortune as hers is a tidy little—er competence for a man to start married life on," Mr. Jaffrey said, musingly.

Mr. Harley started forward until he stood directly before my master.

"See here, Jaffrey," he began, hotly, "do you think I am after Elinor Burnham's money? For, if you do," he continued, as Mr. Jaffrey made no reply, "let me tell you you are laboring under a tremendous mistake. If you knew her as well as I do, you would understand that it would be simply impossible for a man to come under her influence and not love her. Some fellows might be attracted in the first place by her millions, but unless they were utterly worthless they could not help soon yielding to the charm of her own person. I tell you, Courty, she is far and away the loveliest creature I have ever known. I am sure the prejudice you seem to have formed against her would vanish if you only knew her better."

Mr. Jaffrey raised his eyebrows.

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"My dear fellow," he said, "I am not prejudiced against Miss Burnham."

"Well, you always seem to avoid her. She herself has spoken of it."

Mr. Jaffrey leaned forward to knock the ash off his cigar, which action he performed a little clumsily. When he responded it was with a change of subject.

"So—er you think there are other grounds for this coolness you—er complain of?"

"I don't complain of it, Jaffrey," Mr. Harley returned, proudly. "I've done nothing of which I need be ashamed, thank God!"—I glanced at my master; his eyes were fixed upon the fire. Was it the reflection from the glowing embers that gave that dull red flush to his face?—"I can hold my head erect and look any man in the eyes. But I thought you might have heard some reason for these fellows' treatment of me, and so I decided to simply ask you if you could explain it. I don't seek sympathy; I only want some light thrown on the matter. If it's a personal prejudice against me, they may go hang; but if some one has been slandering me behind my back, I'd like the privilege of horsewhipping him; that's all."

He took a fresh cigar and lighted it, while my master sat ruminating. Presently the latter said,—

"Er—I've been trying to think if I've ever

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heard any one say—er anything against you, old man ; but I can't seem to—er recall a single thing. However, they wouldn't—er be exactly likely to say anything before me, you know. They're all pretty well aware how—er—how—er I feel toward you. But, if you like, Harley, I'll—er sound them on the subject. Only I—er think it only fair to tell you that if they should—er say anything I didn't like, I might deprive you of the pleasure of—er horsewhipping them."

But Mr. Harley naturally wouldn't hear of this. He was quite too lofty a gentleman to allow his character to be vindicated by even his most intimate friend. He thanked my master cordially, but declared that he would on no account permit inquiry to be made into the matter. He was quite able, he said, to face any amount of coldness and reserve, being absolutely innocent of having afforded reason for the same. Should open insult or complete rupture of hitherto friendly relations ensue, he would know how to defend himself.

He departed soon after, and my master sat for some time after he left, apparently wrapped in thought, and idly gazing into the dying fire. Once, entering the room so quietly that he did not detect my presence, I noticed that he was looking intently at something which lay upon his crossed knees.

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I glanced surreptitiously over his shoulder, his back being toward the door, and saw that the object upon which his eyes were riveted was a newspaper. The sheet was adorned with wood-cuts of some of the most celebrated of New York's society women, and the face which held his attention bore beneath it the inscription "Miss Elinor Leyland Burnham, the latest aspiration of the *jeunesse dorée* of New York."

I found that same paper the next morning carelessly tossed upon the floor, but—that particular wood-cut was missing from it.

Easter fell early that year, I remember. I think Lent came in about the middle of February, for it was somewhere toward the last of March that Mrs. Leyland, who had a fine country-place at Lenox, sent out invitations to a large house-party for the Easter holidays, my master being included among the guests.

I wish I could find some interesting matter to relate of the course of Mr. Jaffrey's life along about this time, before we went down to Berkshire, for I would gladly stave off for a while the rehearsal of the unhappy events of that visit, besides being loath to say farewell again to the master whom I so gladly served, the man whom I so truly loved, the hero, albeit a curiously deficient one, who yet proved at the last his claim to be written up as such.

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But nothing worthy of note took place during the rest of that winter.

The prejudice against Mr. Harley strengthened, and I think Mr. Jaffrey made one or two unsuccessful attempts to discover the reason for it ; but as the gentleman was sent abroad soon after that evening on which he opened his heart to my master, by the firm in which he occupied a trusted position, it was only by occasional hints and innuendoes that Mr. Jaffrey gathered what the nature of club sentiment toward him was.

I overheard him questioning Mr. Key, one evening, on the subject. The two gentlemen had just come in from a late performance at the Vaudeville, and I had been despatched to prepare them each a cocktail, as the night was cold and they were chilled to the marrow, they said.

As I caught the question on the threshold I made a bold entry into the room, so bold and precipitous an entry that the glasses jingled noisily on the tray and their contents met with a narrow escape from a lowly and unworthy fate. As I passed the tray to Mr. Key I ventured to cast a warning and imploring glance at him. He caught the look and nodded good-naturedly, and I was glad that I had taken extra pains in mixing the drinks, for I felt that after swallowing the genial decoction he could not

feel it in his heart to thwart the wishes of its compounder. I am sure that my master gained no information that night.

But I dreaded Mr. Harley's return. I felt that in the very nature of things there must be an explanation of affairs sometime, and I was terribly affraid Mr. Jaffrey would not be content simply to give the lie to the charge against his friend. I knew him to be a very curiously inconsistent man, thoroughly unscrupulous in the matter of appropriating for his own purposes the superfluous possessions of others, but absurdly sensitive concerning certain points of honor. He was a very singular contradiction, and one on whose actions under certain conditions it was impossible to reckon. It would be quite possible that, in order thoroughly to clear his friend from the false imputation brought against him, he would make a clean breast of the whole matter. And then, what? Ruin. Nothing less. I shuddered every time I thought of such a catastrophe, and was glad that Mr. Harley's employers had found it necessary to oblige him to make two voyages across the ocean at a season of the year when such trips involve greater risk than at others.

What a magnificently simple solution of the whole business his "going out," as the medium called it, would be! Of the dead nothing but good! There would be no object then for the

gentlemen to disclose their supposed knowledge of his dishonesty. Naturally they would let the matter drop, and my master would never learn how, unconsciously, his friend had been the scapegoat of his own offences.

Meanwhile Mrs. Jaffrey was an invalid subject to attacks which at any time might prove fatal. I suspected that my master was beginning to feel himself attracted by Miss Burnham. I had never seen them together, and I had heard Mr. Harley charge him with avoiding her through prejudice, but I knew more of Mr. Jaffrey's affairs than Mr. Harley did, and, realizing the impossibility of my master's marrying any woman under existing circumstances, it seemed to me that his avoidance of the society of a particular one was significant. Besides which, a man does not clip from a paper the picture of a woman against whom he is prepossessed, nor does he carry the same over his heart in his note-book.

We did not go down to Berkshire upon the day for which Mr. Jaffrey was invited, as Mrs. Jaffrey took that opportunity to indulge in another attack, and my master was obliged to send a wire deferring his visit for a couple of days.

I think Mr. Jaffrey had had several minds about accepting Mrs. Leyland's invitation at all, for there had been quite a correspondence

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between them concerning it. He had at first declined absolutely, and then she had sent him a note which I could not read, as it was sealed with wax. But it doubtless urged him to reconsider his determination, and I had afterward delivered another note at the Leyland mansion on Fifth Avenue, which again repeated his regrets.

The next morning had come a little communication from Miss Burnham, which my master did not destroy after reading, according to his custom, but which I later on discovered in his note-book. It ran thus :

“DEAR MR. JAFFREY,—

“Aunt Laura is so disappointed at your decision, and so am I. We are horribly persistent, I know, but would it not be possible for you to give us even a couple of days out of the week? Don't decide now if the chances are against it, but say that if we reserve a room for you, you may be able to run down for a night or two. Hoping you will allow us to persuade you, I remain

“Very cordially yours,

“ELINOR LEYLAND BURNHAM.”

I presume that this did the business, and that my master replied to it in person, for I was not intrusted with any answer.

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It was late in the afternoon of a cold, raw March day when we reached Lenox station. As I followed my master out of the overheated car, however, we found a bright welcome awaiting us, which made us quite forget that there was no sun about.

A groom was standing at the head of a clean-looking mare hitched to a dog-cart, in which was seated Miss Burnham, reins and whip in hand, who cast upon my master a warm smile of welcome which even included me, his servant.

The smile found a reflection in Mr. Jaffrey's face ; indeed, he would have been a surly brute who had not responded cordially to it, and as he went forward with lifted hat the girl said, in a soft, really musical voice, an exception among the voices of American women,—

“ You see I could not resist coming for you myself. Indeed, there was no one else to come, for they are all gone on a coaching trip to Barrington, and you will find the house quite deserted when you arrive.”

Mr. Jaffrey pressed the hand she held out to him.

“ You stayed at home to come over for me ?” he asked, and I noticed that always in addressing her he dropped the drawl from his speech. “ You are too good, quite. I am sorry you should have lost a pleasure on my account.”

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Miss Burnham flushed a little consciously. "I wanted to come," she replied, simply. "Now, about your traps. If your man"—turning to me with her pretty smile—"will show them to Birch, he will see to them."

She motioned to the groom who was holding the impatient horse. Mr. Jaffrey mounted the cart, and the groom and I went off about the luggage.

It was a very comfortable billet, was Longview, Mrs. Leyland's place,—a big, roomy stone house covered with Japanese ivy (which now, of course, was out of leaf), built probably after an English model and situated in the midst of a fairly large estate. The servants' hall was well looked after, and I think that the rest of the establishment was similarly conducted.

I went up on the trap with the luggage, and found quite a number of maids and men having tea in the servants' hall when I arrived. I was made welcome, and learned that my master and Miss Burnham were being likewise refreshed above-stairs, and that an elderly guest, the mother of one of the absent coaching-party, was to have played propriety by mounting guard over the couple, but that she had fallen asleep in the library during Miss Burnham's absence, and that the latter would not allow her to be awakened. I blessed Morpheus and wished God-speed to the *tête-à-tête*.

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The butler, on returning from serving tea, announced that the two were as cosy, sitting on either side of a huge fire in the luxurious hall, as turtle-doves.

"Miss Burnham does seem a bit excited," he said. "Ah, she's a rare one, she is! A lucky man him as gets her."

And, indeed, when, an hour or so later, my master came up to be dressed for dinner, I thought that Miss Burnham's excitement must have been contagious, for I had never seen him look so alert and handsome.

I took great pains to ingratiate myself with Dora, Miss Burnham's own woman, for I felt that I might get from her considerable information regarding her mistress. She was a Swede, a bright, clever, capable little creature with a gossipy tongue and merry disposition. She seemed very fond of Miss Burnham and deeply interested in her future.

"My!" she exclaimed, while we were having breakfast the next morning, "but doesn't Mr. Jaffrey look like Mr. Harley! I suppose that's why Miss Burnham takes to him so."

"To whom?" I asked. "To Mr. Harley?"

She turned up her little nose. "No: to your master, of course. Ain't she going to marry Mr. Harley?"

"Is she?" I inquired, with interest.

"Why, of course, She's only waiting, I

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guess, for him to get home to have it come out. He's coming this week, too. They're expecting him down here.''

I wondered if she had any trustworthy grounds for her assertion. Sometimes these girls jump pretty hastily at conclusions.

I learned from the butler later that there were about a dozen people staying at Longview. Among them were several acquaintances of the reader, namely, Mrs. Noble-Revere, Miss Belmine, Mr. Key, Mr. Bellew, and Mr. Despard. The others it will not be necessary to introduce, as they are simply walking ladies and gentlemen in this little drama. The party appeared to be a congenial one, and the sounds of gayety and mirth often penetrated even to the servants' quarters.

I had never known my master appear so light-hearted and happy. It seemed as if the cloud which had recently been hanging over his spirits had wholly vanished, leaving him quite the reverse of what he had been of late. But I thought he rather avoided his own society, and perhaps mine also. He was in his room as little as possible, even cutting me short in the details of his toilet in order to get downstairs again without unnecessary delay.

His new mood did not strike me as quite natural to him. It was not exactly in keeping with his usual rather quiet, indolent character.

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The restless activity and high animal spirits which had now taken possession of him made him seem quite another man from the Courtice Jaffrey I had been familiar with in New York. I often wondered what had come over him, and had hard work to satisfy myself on the point.

I could not understand his light-heartedness, and sometimes thought it was just pure recklessness, a sort of devil-may-care determination to make the most of present opportunities, to enjoy himself up to the handle while he could, let the consequences be what they might.

And yet, I thought, how could a man with his tender feelings so quickly forget that he had just been watching beside the possible death-bed of his wife? How could he so soon enter into a flirtation (and quite a desperate one, too, if any faith could be placed in the gossip of the butler, footmen, and grooms) with another woman?

A dark thought entered my mind, but I would not let it gain foothold. I might have believed it of many men, but of my master, never. The suggestion—I almost hate to write it here, only I want to show just how non-plussed I was—was that he might be quietly ridding himself of—but no; I cannot put such a suspicion of Mr. Jaffrey into words. I should never have dreamed of it, excepting for his

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unnatural manner and the increasing frequency and danger of Mrs. Jaffrey's attacks.

The second day after our arrival Dora informed us at dinner, which was a mid-day affair in the servants' hall, that Mr. Harley's steamer was in, and that he had telegraphed he would be down that afternoon.

"Wonder will Miss Burnham go over to meet him!" exclaimed Holly, one of the footmen.

"Not she; she's going to show Mr. Jaffrey the Glen. She's going to ride the Jewess, and the dude—excuse me, Mr. Hanby: no offence meant—is going to ride Duke. I carried the orders to Birch awhile back." An under-footman was the speaker.

"How's the betting now, ladies and gentlemen?" asked the butler, throwing his glance around the table. "I'm giving long odds on the dude. Am willing to back him against the field for a considerable figure."

No one seemed disposed to accept the proposed wager. Evidently the dude was the favorite. But I had a little money in my pocket that said Mr. Jaffrey would not marry Miss Burnham, and so I took up the offer.

"See here, Mr. Rawson," I said, "how much is it to be?"

There was a general exclamation.

"Why, Mr. Hanby, you aren't never going

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to bet against your own gentleman!" said Dora.

"Well, Miss Dora, I just am," I replied. "If I lose, I shan't so much mind, I shall be so pleased to think my gentleman's been so lucky."

"My! I am surprised at you, Mr. Hanby, truly I am," she returned, with a coquettish reproof in her blue eyes.

Rawson and I arranged our bet, and Mrs. Horne, the head kitchen-maid, a very respectable elderly American woman, agreed (with a protest against betting) to hold the stakes.

I would have given much for an opportunity of seeing Miss Burnham and my master together, that I might judge for myself whether or not there were grounds for the rumors afloat in the servants' hall. But, as I had, of course, no duties to perform which would bring me among the guests, I never for a moment dreamed that I should be so fortunate as to secure such a chance. What was my delight, then, when upon the very next day the coveted opportunity was offered me!





CHAPTER VII

MR. HARLEY did arrive that afternoon. While I was dressing my master for dinner he knocked at the door and came in. The gentlemen had already met below-stairs, but a renewal of greetings was now warmly exchanged between them.

Mr. Harley was looking finely. Evidently his ocean voyages had had results quite contrary to those I had hoped for. The resemblance which I had used to think existed between him and my master was now scarcely perceptible excepting as regarded height, coloring, and general aspect, for in the same ratio in which Mr. Harley had grown bronzed, strong, and healthy my master had become thin, wan, and pale.

I was quite surprised that I had not noticed before the change which had taken place in him. But, on thinking it over since, I have concluded that his high spirits blinded me to his physical condition. Now, beside Mr. Harley he appeared like shadow beside sub-

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stance, and I was quite shocked to see how low he had got to be beneath my very eyes.

Mr. Harley had evidently noticed it at once, for he now excused his visit by remarking,—

“I say, Courty, old man, I dropped in for just a minute to ask what you have been doing with yourself. You’re looking awfully seedy, old chap ; and we can’t have that, you know.”

He was evidently considerably concerned, but Mr. Jaffrey laughed his anxiety away.

“Seedy !” he repeated. “Oh—er, you’ve been associating with—er sailors for a week or so, Harley, and—er are not used to our refined social pallor, that’s all. I’m no end fit, old chappie, and—er putting in a quite awfully good time down here.”

“I see the freeze-out still continues,” Mr. Harley said, with an attempt at a careless laugh. “B-r-r-r ! I positively shivered when Key and Bettall greeted me.”

Mr. Jaffrey turned to me.

“You may—er go, Hanby,” he said. “I can finish without you.”

“Very good, sir,” I replied, and went—as far as the other side of the door, where, applying my ear close to the key-hole, I could easily hear the conversation that took place within the room.

I was getting terribly nervous. I had dreaded Mr. Harley’s return beyond words,

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for I felt certain that an open rupture must soon take place between him and the men who considered him a thief. I felt that I had made an ass of myself in mixing the matter up so, for if I had used my brains I might have seen that no gentlemen would continue to treat as a friend and companion a man under such a cloud as that which I had cast over Mr. Harley.

I had racked my brain to devise some way of clearing him, but in vain. I had distinctly assured Mr. Key that my master was aware of, and had even discussed with me, his friend's guilt. If I were to go now and tell him that I was a liar, as, for my master's sake, I was willing to do, he would of course at once begin an investigation as to my motives for deceiving him.

It would naturally appear to him that I had accused Mr. Harley in order to shield some one else. Who could that other person be? Myself? Impossible. I might, it is true, have robbed the duchess, but it was quite out of the question that I could also have stolen Madame Caprices' jewels, having been without opportunity for so doing. If not for myself, then for whom else would I have been likely to go the length of perjury? For my master, of course. I had dwelt strongly upon the fact of my attachment to him in my interview with Mr. Key, and, indeed, I was aware that Mr.

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Jaffrey was often chaffed on the subject of the somewhat unusual devotion of his henchman, as his friends termed me.

Once let the faintest suspicion rest upon Mr. Jaffrey, and I knew how rapidly evidence must accumulate against him. The description of the thief given by the medium exactly identified him ; it had been in his apartments that the duchess had last been positively assured of the possession of her diamonds ; he, better than any other, had had access to the jewels of Madame Caprices, having been, at the time of their loss, playing the *rôle* of tame cat to that lady ; one of those very jewels had been seen by several men in his possession ; he had told a cock-and-bull story about recovering it, and had also acknowledged that he was acquainted, intimately, with the thief. He had even attempted to gain sympathy for the latter, and had refused to disclose his name, asseverating, however, that Madame Caprices was aware of it. Then had come the rupture of the connection between the Señora and himself, which had been much commented upon, setting gossips agog for some days. Not that the two were on terms of absolute enmity, but the intimate relationship hitherto existing between them had come to an abrupt conclusion.

I recognized that all these significant facts made up a pretty large pile of inflammable

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material which a spark of suspicion would kindle into a blaze that would shrivel my master's reputation to ashes. No wonder, then, that I, who, in my solicitude for Mr. Jaffrey, had drawn him into a position a thousand times more compromising than that he had formerly occupied, availed myself of every opportunity of discovering how untenable it was becoming.

The door had scarcely closed behind me when I heard my master say, gravely,—

“See here, Harley, really, you know, I don't think this is any longer a—er jesting matter. There is a prejudice against you ; I—er convinced myself of that during your absence, although—er, try as I would, I could not find out—er what has occasioned it. Now—er, I think it is a duty you owe yourself to—er unearth the cause of it.”

Then Mr. Harley said, very quietly,—

“How would you set about it, Jaffrey?”

And my master replied, “By going to Key or Bettall like a man, and—er asking for an explanation.”

There was a suggestion of anger in Mr. Harley's voice as he said, quickly,—

“Your words would imply that I am a coward, Jaffrey. It isn't from fear that I hold back from demanding an explanation from those fellows : it is from pride. If you had a clear conscience and had given no one cause for

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offence, would you stoop to sue for their reasons for taking it?"

There was a pause, broken finally by my master.

"If I had a clear conscience," he said, slowly, as if musing to himself, "if—I—had—a clear—conscience"—then, suddenly, "No, I'll be d—d if I'd ask reasons of any man under God's heavens. I'd be satisfied with the conscience, Harley. Old man, you're right. Let those fellows go hang. Concern yourself no more about them. My God! if I were in your place I'd snap my fingers in the face of all creation."

He broke off abruptly, and I don't doubt that Mr. Harley looked the surprise his tone indicated as he exclaimed,—

"In my place! Why, Jaffrey, what do you mean by that? I don't know that my place is particularly enviable."

Mr. Jaffrey gave a short laugh. "Don't you?" he said. "Well, I do."

"Just how?"

"You stand every chance of winning Miss Burnham."

"You still think me mercenary?"

"No; I think, as you once said, no man can remain mercenary under her influence. And—er, to do you justice, Harley, I never credited you with—er mercenary motives."

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"Thank you. You have changed your opinion of Miss Burnham."

"No ; I have never held but the one."

"Yet you used to avoid her."

"I had my reasons ; selfish, prudential reasons."

There was a little silence ; then Mr. Harley said, with some passion in his voice,—

"Courty, why do you think I have any chance with her?"

"Why?" my master flashed out, suddenly,—"why? Good heavens, man, you've got a tongue in your head, haven't you? and, as you say, a clear conscience? Why shouldn't you have a chance with her? A whole body, a clean heart, a sound brain, an honest name, and a clear conscience,—what else does a man want to win a woman with?"

I had never heard him so excited, save once. Had Mr. Harley been less vitally concerned with the subject under discussion, he could not have failed to be surprised at his warmth. But it apparently did not impress him, for he returned, quickly,—

"Then why don't you try for her yourself?"

His question pricked my master's excitement. He did not reply to it at once, but when he did every spark of enthusiasm was gone from his voice. It sounded dull, flat, and lifeless.

"Because," he said, with an attempt at a

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careless laugh,—“well-er, because a better fellow has-er got the-er inside track.”

“You are very encouraging,” said Mr. Harley, doubtfully; “but, if that is so, she might at least have been at home to welcome me on my arrival, instead of philandering about the country with another man.”

“Such women as she, my boy, do not wear their hearts on their sleeves for-er daws or country jays to peck at.”

Mr. Harley drew a deep sigh.

“Well, God knows I wish you may be right, Courty, but——” I heard his chair creak as if he were rising from it, and, suspecting that he was about to take his departure, I fled, happy in the assurance I had gained that the sleeping dogs were to be left to lie, undisturbed.

I said at the conclusion of the foregoing chapter that I rejoiced at the opportunity which I was unexpectedly afforded, upon the following day, of observing Miss Burnham and Mr. Jaffrey together. If the occasion in anticipation gave me cause for joy, in fulfilment it rendered me the most miserable, unhappy, world-cursing wretch that ever walked the earth.

Since that night I haven't cared a farthing for any living being. I wouldn't put out a finger to keep a blind beggar from walking into a conflagration, nor would I step a pace out of my way to save an infant from sure death.

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There's only one figure on my horizon now, and that's Jenkins Hanby. "After me," as the French say, "the deluge."

I've tried my little best to save a man from destruction and failed, signally. What little heart I ever had was in that work, and now I don't care a fig whether the fate of Sodom and Gomorrah overtakes the world, or whether it jogs on to annihilation in its own way. It's all one to me.

One thing I will say here and now, that after that final catastrophe I cut myself loose from high society. I felt it was no place for me, and perhaps it, also, shared my sentiments. I just cut adrift from every one I had ever known while in Mr. Jaffrey's employ, and my manner of existence since then concerns nobody. I might have made a very comfortable living out of Señora Caprices, but some of my master's queer notions kind of rooted themselves in me, and I couldn't quite bring myself to break our former agreement. I've done many worse things than that, however, and I know I'm inconsistent—but then so was my master, and so is all the world, for that matter.

Don't you go to church and subscribe liberally to foreign missions, and pass negligently by the most crying cases of destitution in your daily walks? Don't you belong to the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, and

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while you are attending its meetings keep your horses awaiting your leisure in a temperature cold enough to freeze a polar bear? Don't you protest against the evils of gambling, encourage efforts to put down policy-shops and faro-banks, and yet draw your daily income from the biggest gambling-shop in the world,—the Stock-Exchange?

Inconsistent, my story and its hero? The charge is a true one, but it is equally applicable to the life of every man, woman, and child that reads these pages. Show me any thoroughly consistent life, and I'll back down and call the inconsistencies of Mr. Jaffrey's character unnatural; but you can't do it, and, as you can't, we'll say no more about it and let the matter drop.

I have no desire to defend or excuse him for anything he ever did. I don't pretend to say that a system of thieving from your intimate friends is admirable, or to be commended as a means of earning your living, and I don't believe myself that he would have advised any one's adopting it. Just how he came to do so I don't know, nor does the world—and I don't care. But this I will say, that I don't believe there lives in the world to-day a being who is mentally, morally, or physically the worse for the inconsistencies of Mr. Jaffrey's character, while I could name hundreds who have profited

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thereby. His depredations were committed against those who could well afford to lose what he took, while his bounty left for his own use but a small proportion of his unlawful gains.

And he suffered ! Let no one close this book with the impression that Courtice Jaffrey escaped scot-free from the penalty of his acts. I would stake my life on the assertion that no social malefactor ever endured greater martyrdom than he went through after his first meeting with Elinor Burnham. I had lived pretty close to him ever since entering his service, and better than any one else I could interpret his moods.

I am very confident of the nature and subject of those long reveries which used to hold him sitting in lonely solitude before his hearth late into the night, after he began somewhat to shun society.

Do you think they were pleasant and joyous ? Does a man ever choose to sit brooding by himself for long hours over happy subjects ? Isn't it a natural impulse to chatter of your joys to some one else, probably a horribly bored victim ?

Does a man, after indulging in pleasurable reminiscences which last half the night, lie tossing restlessly upon his bed the other half ? Does a man happy in his mind grow thin, wan, pale ? Do lines begin to crease his fore-

head, and little wrinkles to come about his eyes?

Oh, I could give you a thousand proofs of the agony of mind my master suffered during those weeks. But what is the use? They wouldn't change your righteous verdict against him. He may have suffered, you would say, and no doubt he did, but so he ought. He may have had some noble impulses—who is wholly without them?—and possibly he was of a beneficent nature, with a talent for winning affection; but—he was nevertheless a thief, and so a reprobate.

Well, doubtless, you are right. I don't care. I knew him and loved him, and that's all I wish to say about it.

Now to go back to my story.

It was a little after dinner upon the day following Mr. Harley's arrival when, as a group of us were chatting in the servants' hall, a message was brought to me by the butler.

It had been a miserable day, a pouring rain with high winds, and I fancy that all the ladies and gentlemen had been pretty considerably taxed for the general amusement.

There had been billiards, whist, singing, recitations, and dancing in the billiard-room, to say nothing of probable flirtations without number, but a rainy day in the country is, under the most favorable circumstances, a long

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one, and lucky is that hostess who has other resources than those of her guests to fall back upon.

It was about ten o'clock when Rawson appeared.

"Mr. Hanby, Mr. Jaffrey wishes to speak with you in the hall," he said.

I at once responded to the summons, and found Mr. Jaffrey, accompanied by Mrs. Leyland, awaiting me. As I presented myself before them my master said,—

"Er—Hanby, Mrs. Leyland has done you the honor of asking you to—er entertain her guests for a little while with—er an exhibition of some of your tricks at—er—at cards."

I bowed. "Very good, sir."

"You are quite willing to do it, Hanby?" Mrs. Leyland asked, graciously.

"I feel complimented, madam, by the request," I replied, in my finest manner.

"Then will you go at once to the library? Rawson will show you the way, and we will join you there.—It will be more cosy than in the drawing-room," she added, turning to Mr. Jaffrey.

I had not long to wait in the fine, handsomely appointed room before my audience came trooping in. The first to appear were Mr. Jaffrey and Miss Burnham, who were somewhat in advance of the rest, and as they came

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slowly sauntering in I thought what a finely matched pair they looked.

My master's high spirits seemed to have deserted him since Mr. Harley's arrival, and to-night he was looking especially tired and wan, yet there was about him a very marked air of distinction, which, if his extraction was lowly, as I fancy was the case, was a special gift of the gods. It rendered him remarkable even among the most highly born. The air of lassitude which characterized him always in greater or less degree was to-night more than usually prominent, and the blue eyes, which took on a peculiar glow of suppressed passion when they rested upon Miss Burnham's face, wore, otherwise, a distant, weary, harassed look that spoke volumes to me.

The girl beside him looked like a fair young goddess. She wore a gown of cream-white satin, made in a peculiarly loose style, the like of which I was familiar with in the fashion-plates of the newspapers, under the title of "An Empire gown." It was cut sufficiently low to disclose her full white neck, but stopped modestly short of any vulgar display. Her ornaments were pearls, a couple of strings about the throat fastened with a clasp of brilliants, two or three pins, confining at the top of the bodice a length of rarely beautiful old lace that fell from bust to toe, and just above her

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brow, resting on that line which divided the waving masses of her dark hair, a lustrous star, held in place by a slender fillet of the same softly gleaming gem.

Her round young arms, with their lovely flesh tints, hung loosely before her, the hands toying unconsciously with a cluster of fragrant freesia, which she had evidently taken from the lace upon her bosom, for later I marked a slight green stain just to the left of the neck, where it had probably lain. Her face was a little flushed and downcast, the eyes resting upon the flowers, which I am sure received but little of her attention.

Neither perceived me as they entered the room, for I was standing somewhat in the background, and they continued for two or three moments the conversation in which they were engaged.

"It is very marked," Miss Burnham was saying,— "one cannot help noticing it,—and very strange."

"It must not influence you," my master replied; adding, earnestly, "promise me that it shall not. Merton Harley is a splendid fellow, a good, clean, honorable man, to whom I would willingly intrust the life of any woman I—in whose welfare I was interested."

The girl looked quickly, involuntarily, up, at the correction. It was an impulsive, uncon-

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scious challenge her eyes flashed into his. But my master did not accept it.

“Will you promise me that nothing shall prejudice you against him? Remember, it is a cowardly, underhanded attack these fellows are making upon him. I have tried by every means in my power to induce them to come forward and make some open accusation which Harley could meet.”

“And they refuse to do so?”

“Well, not in so many words. They shrug their shoulders and look significant, as much as to say, ‘There are none so blind as those who won’t see.’”

They had paused now beside the fireplace, in which big logs were burning. Miss Burnham gazed for a minute into their blazing depths, and then said, slowly,—

“Mr. Jaffrey, you were not at the séance in Mr. Despard’s studio: have you ever been told anything about it?”

My master replied that he had.

“Did you know that that curious woman made a sort of veiled charge of robbery against Mr. Harley?”

Mr. Jaffrey bowed.

“Do you think”—the girl hesitated—“it is quite ridiculous, I know, but do you think that could possibly have prejudiced any one against him?”

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Mr. Jaffrey looked utter amazement.

"Why, no," he exclaimed. "I never dreamed that it could—— No, it is impossible. Attach any importance to such testimony as that? No, it would be incredible." And yet he frowned, and it was evident the thought troubled him.

His companion gave a little laugh. "Of course it would be absurd," she said. "How could any one suspect a gentleman of being a thief?"

One of the wretched, treacherous impulses of which my master was occasionally a victim assailed him now. He took a step forward, and, bending, looked eagerly into the lovely face lifted to his.

"And yet," he asked, hurriedly, "if it were true,—if this man, loving you with all the love a strong man's heart can feel for a woman, were to be proved a thief,—what then? what then? You would loathe, scorn, condemn him, I suppose? There could be no extenuating circumstances of need or necessity, of desperate straits requiring desperate means for relief, of the emergencies and wants of others dependent upon the man's otherwise fruitless endeavors, to soften your judgment of him, to win your sympathy for him?"

There was a moment's breathless pause. I think the girl suspected that there was some-

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thing at the root of Mr. Jaffrey's hot eloquence, but I also think she felt it had to do with Mr. Harley, never for a moment suspecting the speaker's intimate interest in her answer.

She was but a young girl, with all a well-bred young girl's fine intolerance of dishonor of any sort, and as she delivered her answer she threw her head up and confronted her companion with all the uncompromising severity of an incorruptible young judge.

"No," she said, her voice ringing clear and scornful upon the air. "No, I would have no sympathy for such a man. A thief! An unscrupulous, dishonest wretch, who takes advantage of the privileges of association with respectable people, with ladies and gentlemen who trust in his integrity and confide in his honor, to rob, plunder, betray them! The love of such a scoundrel! Why, Mr. Jaffrey, I should esteem it an insult, a degradation, a humiliation. I should loathe myself for having inspired it, feeling that there must be something wrong within me to have attracted such a creature! Oh,"—she broke off with a little shudder,—“do not let us talk of such a thing. I am getting quite uncomfortable at the mere suggestion.” Then, as a sudden thought seemed to strike her, “Why did you ask me such a queer question, Mr. Jaffrey?” she continued,

gravely. "You have told me there was nothing even questionable about Mr. Harley, and yet—you have aroused my suspicions."

Mr. Jaffrey's self-control was marvellous. His voice was quite steady as he replied,—

"I am sorry I have done such an unwarrantable thing. Harley is all I have said of him. I was thinking of—a man I once knew, no one in whom you have a shadow of interest. That is all. You will promise me never to believe anything against Merton Harley?"

She drew a long breath of relief. "Oh, yes," she said. She took a couple of sprays of freesia from her cluster. "There is my promise, signed, sealed, and delivered."

He took them from her and put them in the place of the large boutonnière of white carnations which he had been wearing. Miss Burnham was beginning upon some irrelevant subject, when the sound of approaching voices became audible.

"Here they come," she said, interrupting herself. "I was wondering where they were. And your man, Mr. Jaffrey, he does not seem to put in an appearance. Hadn't you better ring for him?"

My master was about placing his hand upon the bell, when, passing quickly and noiselessly out of a door behind me, I made a conspicuous

re-entry. Mr. Jaffrey observed my entrance and nodded.

"Ah—er there you are, Hanby," he said, in his usual indifferent manner.

The ladies and gentlemen disposed themselves about the table behind which I stood with my cards. Mr. Harley sat upon one side of Miss Burnham and Mr. Key upon the other, while my master, toward whom the girl had cast a look of invitation as she took her seat, disregarding the glance, remained standing, withdrawn somewhat into the background. In response to a suggestion that he should come forward, he replied that he knew the tricks by heart, having often, when bored, had me in to amuse him with them.

It was a very effective scene which I confronted, and I can recall it distinctly whenever I choose to do so. It made an indelible impression upon my memory.

There was the handsome dark setting of the library, panelled and rafted with rich mahogany that caught and ruddily reflected the brilliant light from many marvellously clothed lamps which, with the hot flame of the fire, alone illumined the room. In the foreground were the women, gorgeously apparelled, and for the most part fair of face and form, with glittering jewels and smiling features ; and the men, the very flower of metropolitan life,

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goodly of appearance, exquisite of costume, courteous of manner. There also, the chief feature in the whole scene to my eyes, was the tall, distinguished figure of my master looming up distinctly behind the group, and a notably conspicuous member of it, being the only erect person, besides myself, in the room.

His pale face struck wretched forebodings to my mind: I do not know what I feared or apprehended as I looked at it. It wore an expression suggestive of tragedy.

I did my tricks, not as well as usual, for my hands bungled wretchedly, but my audience did not discover my awkwardness and were pleased to express warm approval of my skill. I was in the middle of the best in my *répertoire*, when I was suddenly interrupted.

Miss Burnham had given a little cry of surprise. Of course the general attention was diverted from me to her.

"What is the matter?" some one asked.

"Oh, nothing. I am sorry to have interrupted you all. The fact is, I've just discovered a loss, and my exclamation was involuntary."

"What have you lost?" a voice from the crowd inquired.

"An old pearl marguerite which I prize highly," the girl replied, moving her chair back a little and stooping to search the floor,

shaking out the loose folds of her lace drapery as she did so. "It belonged to my mother," she added, as if to excuse her perturbation.

An immediate search was begun, notwithstanding the girl's protestations, and I stood, my occupation gone, watching the scene. I had noticed that when Miss Burnham announced her loss, Mr. Key flashed a quick, suspicious glance at Mr. Harley, and my heart stood still. When the general uprising took place, Mr. Key went over to where Mr. Bettall was standing, a few paces distant. He drew him aside from the searchers, and the two, unnoticed by the others, conferred a moment apart.

Suddenly, as the sympathetic men and women were about abandoning the search as vain, and in the midst of their volubly expressed exclamations of condolence, Mr. Key, with an angry, determined look on his face, came forward and addressed his hostess.

"Pardon me if I make a suggestion, Mrs. Leyland," he said, in a clear, cutting tone. "Miss Burnham has met with a heavy, an irreparable loss. I have good reason to think that she has not been the victim of accident, but of intention. I am firmly convinced that she has been robbed, and that the thief is in this room at this moment."

The effect of his words was dramatic. His announcement called forth many exclamations

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of surprise, astonishment, and alarm. The women drew closer together and peered apprehensively into the shadowy corners of the library; the men muttered low ejaculations to themselves. Mrs. Leyland regarded him with dismay.

"You think a thief is concealed here!" she exclaimed. "Why, Mr. Key!"

The latter shook his head. He was pretty white. A man cannot make unmoved a charge such as he contemplated making.

"No, madam; I think a thief is unconcealed, at large, here."

He glared at Mr. Harley. His glance was so offensive, so significant, that the latter could not mistake its purport. He stepped forward and confronted Mr. Key. There were anger, resentment, indignation, in his look, but there was no guilt. Any fool might have seen that.

"What is your meaning, sir?" he asked, haughtily. "Your look and manner would seem to accuse me."

"Then they do not belie my intention," the other replied, hotly.

There was a general movement of consternation. Some man, a stranger to me, stepped forward and laid a protesting hand on Mr. Key's shoulder.

"Gordon, hold on," he said: "this is no

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place for a scene. Remember, there are ladies present."

But it was quite too late for interference. The stubbornness which had gained Mr. Key the title of "God's Donkey" was rampant; besides which, it was scarcely to be expected that a man so publicly accused as Mr. Harley had been would permit even a brief space to elapse before meeting the charge.

His face was white to the lips, but there was a look of satisfaction in his eyes. I think, although the indictment was so monstrous a one, it was a relief to him to confront it. He bore himself admirably. If there had been even a germ of suspicion bred in any mind present by Mr. Key's words, his demeanor must have killed it.

He cast one glance at Mr. Key, scornful, resentful, disdainful, and then stepped forward to Mrs. Leyland.

"Madam," he said, in a calm, even tone, "I am your guest. I regret that even innocently and involuntarily I should be the cause of so unseemly a disturbance beneath your roof. I do not know if this gentleman is mad, or what grounds he has for so singular a delusion. However, so grave an accusation must be backed by some sort of evidence. It is most unfortunate to be obliged to turn a cheery house-party into a board of inquiry, but neces-

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sity obliges me to ask you to demand of Mr. Key his reasons for this most strange attack upon me."

Mrs. Leyland, a woman of considerable presence and dignity, bowed.

"A strange attack, indeed," she answered, in her usual cordial tones. Then, turning to Mr. Key, she continued, coldly, "You have insulted one of my guests, sir, most deeply, and, I cannot but think, most unwarrantably. I must ask you to state the grounds of your suspicion."

I fancy Mr. Key began to feel that he had ill-timed his attack. Probably under other circumstances he would have refrained from an assault in the presence of such an audience, but, undoubtedly, jealousy had obscured his better judgment. It was now too late, however, for him to back down.

He acknowledged Mrs. Leyland's rebuke with a bow.

"I regret having acted from impulse, Mrs. Leyland, and must ask you to pardon my having done so," he said, "but I have for a considerable time reproached myself with being in a manner accessory to this man's crimes. I could not allow him to commit another unexposed. I have excellent and incontestable evidence that he is the thief that robbed the Duchess of Clayborough of her diamonds and

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Señora Caprices of her jewels. My witnesses to the truth of this statement are present."

It is impossible to describe the sensation his words produced. Horror, incredulity, amazement, were written on every face. The women fairly gasped as they listened. Mr. Harley alone showed little emotion. A smile curved his handsome lips. I think he thought the man really mad.

But among his audience were two whose very souls quaked and trembled as he spoke. I was one ; the other was my master.

I glanced at Mr. Jaffrey. A mask would have shown more feeling than his face. Cold, pale, and still, it was as if the heart that should have given it animation lay dead in its owner's breast. I followed the direction of his look ; it was fixed on Elinor Burnham, who stood with trembling limbs and white, frightened face a little aloof from the others in the shadow of a tall slender pedestal which supported a marble bust, with the material of which her face vied in color.

The charge was so unexpected that for a few moments no one, not even the man who was its object, had words wherewith to reply to it. Before any one found tongue, Rawson appeared in the door-way, a silver salver in his hand. Upon it lay a pale yellow envelope.

He approached my master.

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“For you, sir,” he said, presenting the tray.

Mechanically Mr. Jaffrey took up the telegram and tore off the cover. He ran his eyes quickly over the contents, and I saw his lips press tightly upon each other. With a sudden, spasmodic movement he crushed the paper in his hand, and as he looked up his glance encountered that of Miss Burnham fixed on him solicitously. I shall never forget the expression in his eyes. I hate to think of it even now.

The girl, meeting it, started forward.

“You have bad news!” she exclaimed, with tender concern. “Oh, what is it?”

He smiled.

“Not so bad,” he replied, in a level, unmoved voice. “It is from Mary Jermyn, my cousin: my mother is dead,—that is all;” and, waving her aside, he stepped forward into the little circle, which by this time had partially recovered from its stupefaction.

As he advanced, some among them murmured a few absent, conventional words expressive of their sympathy, but it was apparent that their minds were too much engrossed with a livelier subject of interest to have noted the seeming indifference of his reply to Miss Burnham. The girl, however, looking as if he had dealt her a blow, shrank back against the pedestal, while I, for an instant, even forgot my overwhelming apprehension in sheer amaze. So

it was Mr. Jaffrey's mother, and not his wife, that had been the object of his devotion. "Oh, ass ! you, Jenkins Hanby !" I thought.

Mr. Harley had waited a bit for the condolences to cease. He now said, addressing himself wholly to his hostess,—

"Will you be so good, Mrs. Leyland, as to ask the gentleman to produce his witnesses?"

The lady looked toward Mr. Key.

"Certainly," he replied ; then, turning suddenly to Mr. Jaffrey, "Jaffrey," he continued, "you have shielded this man long enough. The time has come for you to give him up to the law."

My master looked at the speaker in dull uncomprehension.

"What do you mean?" he asked.

"I mean that you know him to be a thief. Your man, there, told me so. I require that you withdraw your protection from him and bring him to justice."

A gleam of intelligence came into Mr. Jaffrey's face. He turned and looked at me. The others, surprised afresh, followed his example. It was apparent that my presence in the room had been forgotten.

Mr. Jaffrey again addressed himself to Mr. Key.

"You affirm that my man told you that I said Merton Harley had robbed the Duchess

of Clayborough and Señora Caprices?" he asked, in a slow, measured tone.

"I do."

My master again turned in my direction.

"Hanby," he ordered, "step forward. Now," as I fulfilled his command, "you have heard what this gentleman says: is it true?"

I quailed before his look. I saw determination plainly written in his eyes. The game was up. I must face the situation.

"Yes, sir," I replied, briefly.

"You knew at the time that you were speaking falsely,—that I never said anything of the kind?"

"Yes, sir."

"You did it, I presume, to shield some one else,—the real thief?"

His tone was as uncompromising as his words. Again I assented.

He gazed at me a moment. Great God! what a look was in his eyes! It was as if he would say, "I know what you meant to do. I understand, and love you for it, but—oh, Hanby, Hanby!"

Then he said aloud, coldly and sternly,—

"Very well. Now you may tell these ladies and gentlemen who that real thief is."

I saw a chance of saving him, and seized upon it. I threw all the entreaty I could command into my look, beseeching him mutely not to contradict me, and then said, firmly,—

"I, Jenkins Hanby, am the thief, sir."

"You lie! You are again attempting to shield another. Ladies and gentlemen, this man is not to be depended upon: do not heed him. The real thief who robbed the Duchess of Clayborough and Señora Caprices, who has stolen right and left from among you, who has availed himself of a marvellous gift of sleight of hand to possess himself of a competency by dispossessing others, is not Merton Harley, is not Jenkins Hanby: he is none other than I, myself, Courtice Jaffrey."

A sudden cry of terror broke ruthlessly into his speech. It was so quick, so insistent, so compelling, that it blotted even this amazing confession from consideration.

Before any one realized whence it came or what had called it forth, we saw my master spring forward to where Miss Burnham had been standing, push her roughly aside, and the next instant, that same instant, indeed, it seemed, so suddenly the whole thing happened, down upon his own head came crashing the heavy marble bust, crushing him to the ground beneath its great weight.

The men rushed forward to release him, but I was the first to reach his side.

I cannot write any more about it. He was dead: that is enough. The weight had fallen upon his head, striking him full in the temples.



“Down upon his own head came crashing the heavy marble bust.”

The girl afterward said that the shock of his words had deprived her suddenly of all strength. She had fallen back upon the slender pedestal for support. It had given beneath her weight ; she had felt it tottering, had tried to steady it, had felt the bust rocking upon it just above her head, had cried out in sudden alarm, and then——

We raised him and laid him on a lounge. There was no word of any sort from the men, and the deep silence of the room was broken only by the sound of the suppressed weeping of the women.

I had no place there. Soon I should be made the victim of a regular inquisition. I could do but one thing more for him, and then I would steal quietly away, I thought.

I ventured to approach Miss Burnham, who was standing with white face and tightly interlaced fingers on one side of the still figure, waiting for a professional verdict before believing that this could be death. I held in my hand a crushed cluster of freesia that I had picked up from beneath the pedestal.

“Will you place this there?” I asked, in a low tone, and laid my hand an instant upon the quiet heart.

She transferred her glance from him to me, scarcely noting me, however.

“Yes,” she replied, dully, with white, stiff lips.

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I waited to see the flowers placed, and then stole unnoticed from the room, packed my grip, and left the house.

I have no more to tell. The story is ended. To some persons it may seem strange that I should care to publish these details of the life of a man for whom I cared as I did for Mr. Jaffrey. To them I will explain how I came to do so.

One day I overheard some men in a bar-room discussing my master's career. Their information was horribly garbled and made a bad matter a thousand times worse than it really was. I took it upon me to set them right. Then it occurred to me that Mr. Jaffrey's friends might also be doing him scant justice in their hearts, and that I might incline them to a more lenient judgment of him by relating certain facts as I knew them to be.

The names I have made use of in this narrative are, of course, fictitious, but the incidents are true, and I am very sure that those of my master's acquaintances who read these pages will easily identify the man who is their subject.

Hoping that what I have written may breed in their minds a more charitable estimate of the character of one whom living they liked well, even if in death they condemned and repudiated him, I herewith close my task.

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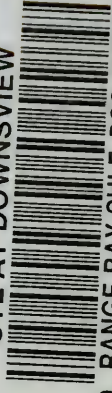
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